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John Etheridge
Willie Watson
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SPECIAL FEATURE
PAUL McCARTNEY
Paul's Beatles-era guitar playing profiled

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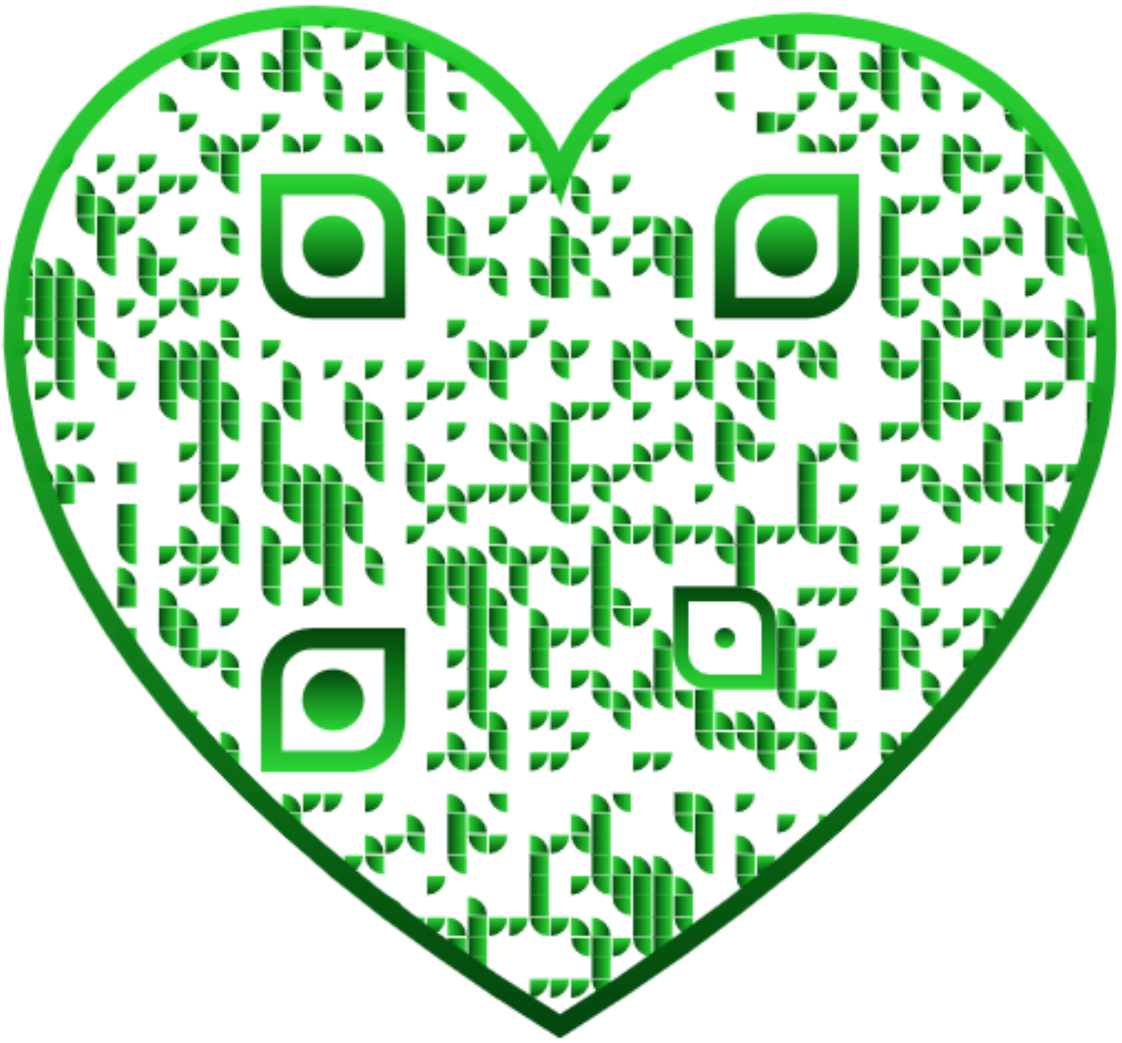

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

www.guitar-bass.net

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com

Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com

Production Editor **Gary Walker**
gary.walker@anthem-publishing.com

Digital Editor **Andy Price**
andy.price@anthem-publishing.com

Digital Assistant **Tom Turner**
tom.turner@anthem-publishing.com

Contributors **Steve Bailey, Rick Batey, Sid Bishop, Simon Bradley, Alan Clayson, Neil Crossley, Rod Fogg, Michael Heatley, Dave Hunter, Jo Johnson, Marcus Leadley, Gareth Morgan, Lars Mullen, Andy Price, Huw Price, Richard Purvis**

Instrument Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Publisher **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING

Senior Sales Executive **Gemma Bown**
Tel **+44 (0) 7788 266847**
gemma.bown@anthem-publishing.com

Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

Managing Director **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com

Editorial Director **Paul Pettengale**
paul.pettengale@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing Executive **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print **Polestar UK Print Ltd**
Tel **+44 (0) 1582 678 900**

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Tel +44 (0) 20 378 79001

LICENSING

Jon Bickley *Tel* **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Jon.Bickley@anthem-publishing.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

https://anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk
Tel **0844 322 1291*** (UK)
Tel **800 428 3003** (US Toll Free)
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Paul's guitar...

It's no exaggeration to state that millions of words have been penned about Paul McCartney's contribution to popular music. One half of the greatest and most influential songwriting partnership in pop history, a vocalist who could take on tender ballads and rip-roaring rockers with equal ease, and a supremely talented bassist, at his peak McCartney could have walked into absolutely any band and improved it. So much of what he did in The Beatles simply set the bar too high to allow those who followed to compete. Yet comparatively little has been written about his six-string guitar playing. Responsible for some of the Fab Four's most memorable lead guitar moments – the solo in George's *Taxman* to name but one example – McCartney might just be the most underrated electric guitarist to have featured in a major band.

This month, we set renowned music historian Alan Clayson the task of charting Paul's six-string contributions to The Beatles; our special feature begins on page 14. Elsewhere in the issue, you'll find a new regular feature in the shape of Vintage Bench Test. Rather than simply ogle vintage instruments like a fledgling guitarist staring through a guitar shop window from the pavement outside, we decided to get, quite literally, to the nuts and bolts of what makes old guitars tick. Kicking things off in considerable style, Huw Price gets to grips with a pair of 1950s Les Pauls, starting on page 86. It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his new column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

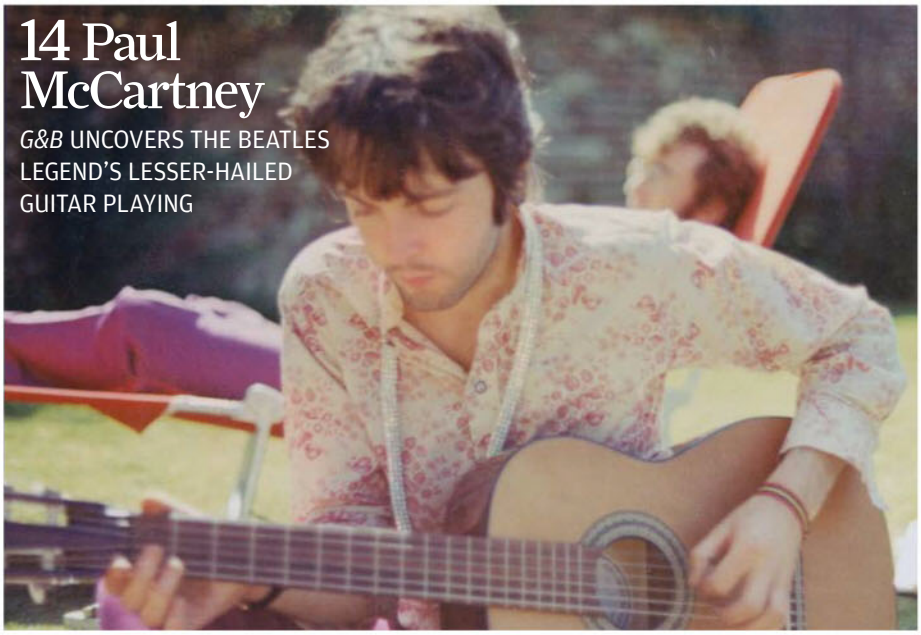
Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

86 Golden Wonders

We turn the spotlight on this stunning pair of 1950s Les Paul Goldtops in our latest Vintage Bench Test



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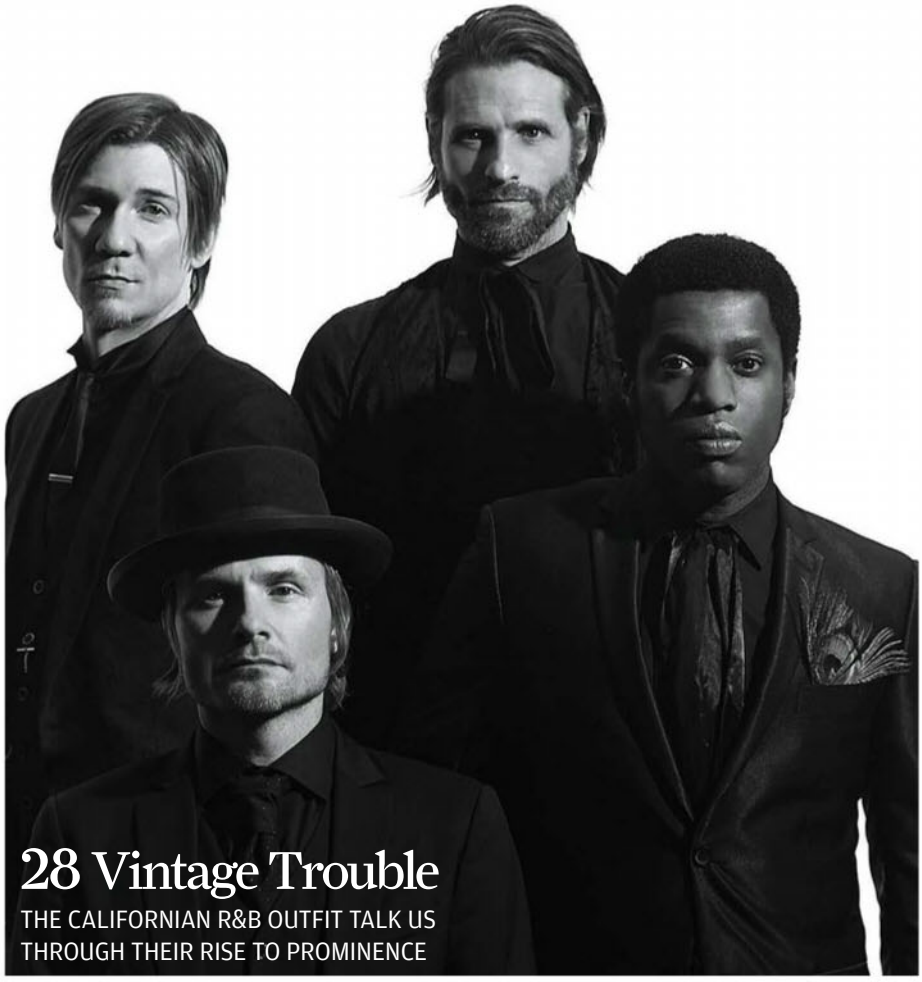

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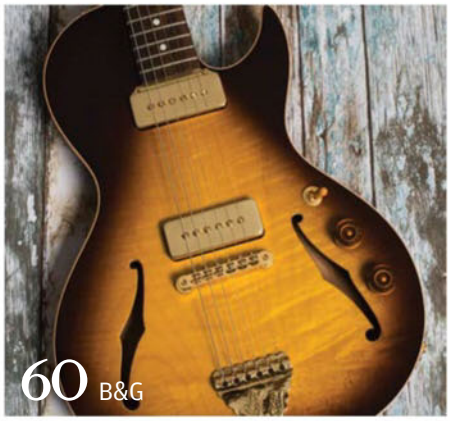

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Ones to watch...

The emerging guitar-based talent on *G&B*'s radar this month

Alvvays

CANADIAN INDIE-POP WALL OF SOUND

Alvvays may hail from remote island provinces in Canada, but their huge, infectious sound is mined from a rich seam of British influences.

Guitarist and vocalist Molly Rankin met co-guitarist Alec O'Hanley in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and a love of Teenage Fanclub, The Smiths and The Jesus And Mary Chain informs their luscious, jangly wall of sound.

Their eponymous debut album is a bittersweet indie-pop delight that reached number one in the US College charts, yet it's this side of the pond that the band, now based in Toronto, are held most dearly.

"We broke more or less in the UK," says O'Hanley, who still works in a Toronto guitar shop when he finds time. "The Brits were more receptive to our stuff. I don't know what it is about UK bands, there was something in the water in the late 80s. We lean pretty heavily on the Glaswegians and Mancunians. We got into The Smiths together, Cocteau Twins were big for us, and Johnny Marr is tough to top. It's him and Lindsey Buckingham for me. The first time I heard *Bandwagonesque* by Teenage Fanclub was one of those moments when blue sparks come pouring out of the speakers."

In *Archie, Marry Me*, Alvvays have a solid-gold classic indie single, yet Molly reveals its romantic notions are misleading: "I wrote the song when a lot of my friends were getting married," she says. "I wasn't sure it was the right time and didn't understand what the rush was. It's a bit of a bitter song, as anthemic as it may seem."

A pair of Fender Deluxe Reverbs are at the heart of the band's live sound, with the Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man, ProCo RAT and Dr. Scientist Reverberator on their boards.

"I've got the reverb at zero most shows, I like the Kevin Shields approach of achieving that wall of sound without reverb," says O'Hanley. "Reverb is valuable and we use it on our record, but delay is just as effective, if not more so." That approach served Alvvays well on a recent sold-out UK tour, and we'd recommend checking them out next time they hit our shores. **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Teenage Fanclub, The Smiths*

GEAR

- **GUITARS** Fender Jazzmaster, Fender Duo-Sonic, Fender Jag-Stang
- **AMPS** Fender Deluxe Reverbs
- **EFFECTS** EHX Deluxe Memory Man, MXR Carbon Copy, Pro Co RAT, Dr. Scientist Reverberator

Anna von Hausswolff

EPIC SCANDINAVIAN STORYTELLING

Swedish songstress Anna von Hausswolff spins fantastical tales of myth and fury, delivered in a towering voice that flits between hushed confessions and howling damnation.

Backed by the progressive rock of her Stockholm band, and the cavernous sounds of a 9,000-pipe Swedish Acusticum organ, it's a heady, immersive noise, as witnessed on the dark, expansive new album *The Miraculous*, released on 13 November.

Joel Fabiansson, one of two guitarists in the band, has the daunting task of finding space in that mix. Fabiansson, who is schooled in jazz playing and cites Frank Zappa as an influence, describes the organ, which extends to three floors, as being: "insane, like a little town inside". "I used a lot of pedals," he reports. "I used a Fender Deluxe Reverb and three Strymon pedals: the BlueSky, El Capistan – and the Deco to make it dirty. I had two RATs – when I want it to be extreme with lots of feedback, I have those two before the Deco, and the saturation on the Deco for a texture on the distortion. We have a very reverby atmosphere, but we try to keep it raw and full of energy."

Von Hausswolff was uncompromising in her creative approach for her third album, with the first single a 10-minute doomy prog epic, *Come Wander With Me/ Deliverance*, which Fabiansson reveals was recorded in just two live takes.

"I can't afford to care about the market's approval," says Anna. "I would lose too much artistic energy, and that would only ruin me."

Amen to that, Anna. **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Anna Calvi, Jefferson Airplane*

GEAR

- **GUITARS** Jakobsson Les Paul Junior-style guitar, Casio PG380 MIDI guitar, Danelectro Baritone
- **AMPS** Fender Deluxe Reverbs
- **EFFECTS** Strymon BlueSky, El Capistan, Deco; Pro Co RAT

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LETTERS FROM AMERICA

PORT CITY MERINO 10-WATT 1X12" COMBO

In his latest look at the best gear across the pond, **DAVE HUNTER** runs the rule over a beautiful little hand-crafted combo

DAVE HUNTER

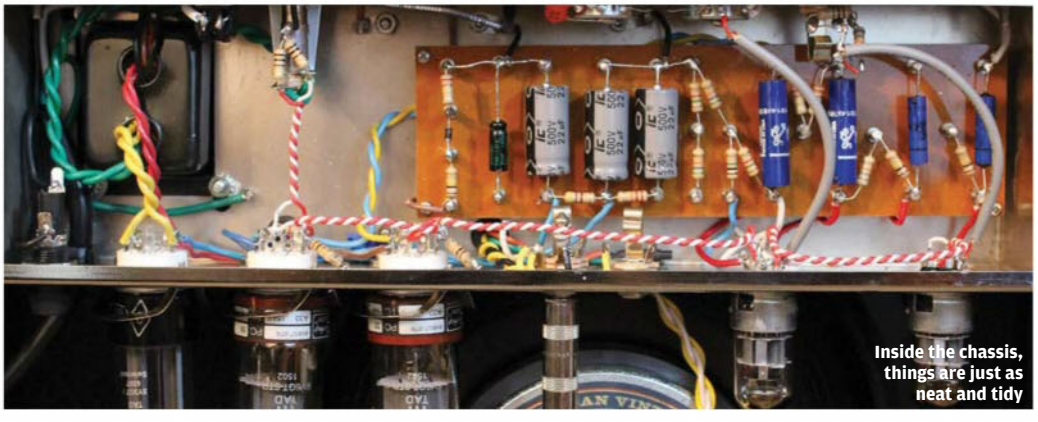
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Since they're based in Asheville, North Carolina, on the edge of the Smoky Mountains, 250 miles from the coast, the origins of the Port City Amplification name might be somewhat puzzling. In fact, the company was founded by Daniel Klein in the ocean-side town of Wilmington, NC, in 2005, but I'd like to think there's a more thematic tie to the moniker: before the amps themselves took off, Klein got significant traction in the market with his ported Wave 1x12 speaker cabinets, for which he received a patent, along with the 2x12 designs that followed. Although ported cabs are traditionally more popular for bass than guitar, I have played both sizes of the Port City creations and, despite being relatively compact, they throw out a boatload of tone, beautifully blending the fullness and punch of closed-back cabs with the balanced frequency spectrum of open-backed designs, and proving themselves adept at virtually any genre of music.

But I digress. While helping to make both their own and other amps sound sweeter through clever cab design, Port City has also been turning out relatively straightforward yet beautifully hand-crafted valve amps aimed at fulfilling a perceived gap in the market without relying on excessive gimmickry. The company's long-running flagship, the Pearl, is a broadly blackface Fender-inspired 50- or 100-watt head with just volume, treble, middle and bass controls, plus an eloquent tube-buffered effects loop – all intended as a stout 'pedal platform' for guitarists who embrace their stompbox-generated overdrive needs. Similarly, the Orleans is a 100-watt tube head for bassists seeking contemporary performance from rich golden-age tone. Landing not a million miles from this ethos, then, we have the latest offering from Port City Amplification: the Merino. Dog simple in operation and blessedly compact, this 1x12 combo with a nominal rating of 10 watts (deceptively, I'd say) aims to perform similar tricks for the club player looking for a firm sonic foundation. It's a package that inspires a bountiful playing-to-tweaking ratio, all at a reasonable price for a hand-wired valve amp using quality components such as SoZo's reproduction "Blue Molded" signal capacitors and US-made Heyboer transformers.

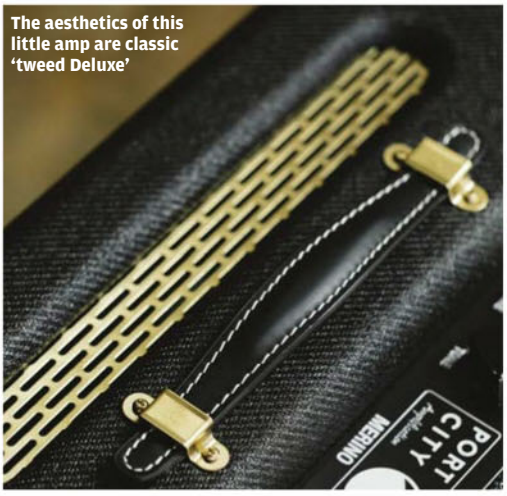
A look inside the chassis confirms that about 90 per cent of the Merino's DNA is tweed Deluxe

Outwardly, the size and format scream tweed Deluxe. Port City's sleek, contemporary styling brings its own look to the table, but the cab is approximately the same dimensions as a narrow-panel tweed Deluxe; it has the same valve complement of two 12AX7s (if you allow swapping the 5E3 V1's 12AY7 for the hotter 12AX7), two 6V6s and a 5Y3 rectifier; and it has the same simple control section, minus the second channel's volume knob. Sure, there are plenty of 5E3 clones out there,



Inside the chassis, things are just as neat and tidy

Despite its compact dimensions, the Merino packs a deceptive punch



The aesthetics of this little amp are classic 'tweed Deluxe'

but to find out what the Merino does differently you need to dig a little deeper. And plug it in, of course.

A look inside the chassis confirms that about 90 per cent of the Merino's DNA is tweed Deluxe, but what happens with that remaining 10 per cent makes a significant difference. Fans of the hallowed 5E3 would find no major surprises from the input through the preamp, but a few tweaks along the way begin to make a difference. Replacing the 5E3's spec .1uF signal cap in the first stage with a .022uF cap should help to keep the boominess down, even with the higher-gain tube in V1. At the output stage, the use of a non-adjustable fixed-bias network on the 6V6s, rather than the tweed Deluxe's cathode biasing, marks an even greater departure, and another large step – as with Fender's evolution in the medium-sized combos in the early 60s – toward a firmer, punchier tone. Slightly larger values in the power-filtering stage (three 22uF electrolytic capacitors rather than three 16uF caps) also work toward that end. It's probably more accurate to think of the Merino as akin to the brownface Princeton of the early 60s, with which it shares the cathodyne (split-phase) phase inverter, although Port City's rendition carries a 12-inch speaker – an American-voiced G12-C from Warehouse Guitar Speakers. Tested with a Telecaster, a Les Paul and a Gretschy-leaning Thorn Artisan 3 with TV Jones Classics, the Merino revealed a bold voice with snappy-edged cutting power, and a performance that works successfully toward Daniel Klein's intentions. With the Telecaster, it remained clean up to around two o'clock – with impressive apparent volume when it got there – something you won't hear from most authentic tweed Deluxes. I'd say we can put any thoughts of "Deluxe redux" behind us and approach the Merino as a different beastie. It breaks up with bark and authority and a meaty, textured grind when you push it further with the Tele, or around the noon mark with the Les Paul, but the available headroom before that point makes it a more confident clean machine or pedal platform than many amps this size. Gas FX Drive Thru and Analogman Prince of Tone overdrive pedals sounded as sweet and dynamic as you'd hope through the Merino at 11 o'clock, allowing a punchy clean tone with either pedal disengaged. The combo stood up well to a Blackout Effectors Musket Fuzz, too, issuing muscular psychedelic rock riffs where many sub-15-watters fold up and fart out. Fans of small- to medium-sized cathode-biased amps may miss the harmonically-saturated, output-tube distortion, but the Merino nails big-amp performance in a portable package for a wide range of smaller clubs and studios.

KEY FEATURES

Port City Merino 10-Watt 1x12" combo

- **PRICE** $1,650 direct (approx. £1,075, plus shipping and any duties)
- **BODY CONTROLS** Volume, tone
- **OUTPUT** 10 watts
- **TUBES** Two 12AX7s, two 6V6GTs, 5Y3 rectifier
- **FEATURES** Dual parallel speaker outputs
- **SPEAKER** WGS G12-C 12"
- **DIMENSIONS** 20"x17.5"x9.25"
- **WEIGHT** 39lb
- **CONTACT** Port City Amplifiers **Daniel@portcityamps.com**

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SIX-STRING ORIGINAL

As if being pop's most famous bassist and one half of the most successful songwriting partnership of all time wasn't enough, Paul McCartney also played memorable guitar parts on many Beatles recordings...

Story **Alan Clayson**

In July, 1965, The Beatles released their second movie, *Help!* During the sequence for the McCartney-penned country-rocker *Another Girl*, the band swap instruments, with John Lennon miming the drums, Ringo Starr playing John's acoustic and George Harrison grappling with Paul's Hofner 500/1. Paul's 'instrument' is a model in a bikini. Intentional or not, this light-hearted crossing of the group's instrumental demarcation lines was a celluloid caricature of what was increasingly taking place behind closed doors during The Beatles' studio sessions.

Harrison mimes the lead guitar parts for *Another Girl* on John's Rickenbacker, but Paul played them in the studio, as he also did on the extraordinary *Ticket To Ride*, recorded on the same day. Paul's guitar playing would be similarly prominent on *Revolver* the following year, with possibly his greatest piece of electric lead work of all lighting up George's album opener, *Taxman*.

> "Paul would take over and do it himself on the left-handed guitar he always brought with him"
>
> **NORMAN SMITH**

Having proven themselves proportionally as sound an investment for EMI as Elvis Presley for RCA, the Fab Four had been granted unlimited time at the company's Abbey Road complex. Therefore, McCartney's ministrations weren't corner-cutting strategies dictated by the studio clock, but by his perfectionism and, to a lesser degree, an insistence on 'written' parts. At the console, engineer Norman Smith witnessed how McCartney – and Lennon – were now treating Harrison and Starr as mere tools for their masterworks, noting that "George would have done two or three takes that seemed perfectly all right, but Paul wouldn't like it, and he'd start quoting American records, telling George to play it like such-and-such a song.

"We'd try again, and then Paul would take over and do it himself on the left-handed guitar he always brought with him. Later, I found out that George had been hating Paul's guts for this, but didn't let it show. It says a lot for George that he took so much stick from Paul."

Smith's successor, Geoff Emerick, was present when McCartney replaced a Harrison solo that took seven hours to record on the title theme of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Was it ever thus? When he joined The Quarry Men in 1958, George had been in the year below Paul at Liverpool Institute High School For Boys, and three years below John at primary school. Nevertheless, his fretboard skills were the most advanced in The Quarry Men – "though that isn't saying very much," qualified Paul, "as we were raw beginners ourselves".

Very much the junior partner in The Beatles, too, "George, being younger and not writing songs then, didn't have the same communication with them," concluded Cynthia, the first Mrs Lennon, "but John and Paul couldn't stop playing together." >

Press Association Images

Paul with his father Jim, who once led Jim Mac's Jazz Band

Getty Images

The young McCartney was bowled over by Elvis's *Heartbreak Hotel*

Getty Images

Neither was George's a particularly musical family – as Paul's very much was. Indeed, in the McCartney living room, there stood an upright piano. Whilst it suffered the investigative pounding of the infant Paul's plump fists, it also tinkled beneath the self-taught hands of his father, who'd once led his own Jim Mac's Jazz Band. After this ensemble broke up, circa 1927, Jim continued to play for his own amusement – and compose, too. He was also the principal accompanist on piano – or a Spanish guitar, a Framus of indeterminate vintage – during those 'musical evenings' that were a frequent occurrence in many households before television became a fixture.

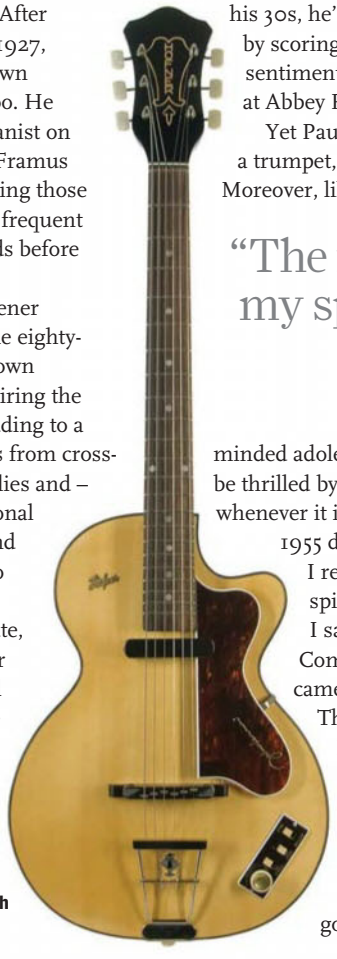
From being a fascinated listener whenever Dad was seated at the eighty-eights, Paul progressed at his own speed on the instrument, acquiring the rudiments of harmony, and adding to a repertoire that embraced tunes from cross-legged primary school assemblies and – then quite a new idea – traditional songs from *Singing Together* and other BBC Home Service radio broadcasts to schools.

On graduating to the Institute, Paul became as well-known for his musical skills as the school bully and football captain were in their chosen spheres. However, an attempt to master a second-hand trumpet his father had given him was, let's say, an incomplete success, put off as he was by the unpredictable harmonics, which jarred his teeth. "Guitars hadn't come in yet," he'd recall, "trumpeters were the big heroes then" – especially Eddie Calvert from Preston, in the same neck of the woods. If well into his 30s, he'd shown what was possible by scoring a 1954 No 1 with the sentimental *Oh Mein Papa*, recorded at Abbey Road Studios.

Yet Paul "couldn't sing with a trumpet, and I wanted to sing". Moreover, like all but the most serious-minded adolescents of the 1950s, he'd be thrilled by *Rock Around The Clock* whenever it intruded upon the airwaves as 1955 drew to a close. "The first time I really ever felt a tingle up my spine," he gasped, "was when I saw Bill Haley and The Comets on the telly. Then he came to the Liverpool Empire. The ticket was 24 shillings, and I was the only one of my mates who could go, as no-one else had been able to save up that amount – but I was single-minded about it. I knew there was something going on here." Described by *Melody Maker* as looking like a "genial butcher", Haley was a disappointment at the Empire, although he paved the way for more genuine US articles, notably Elvis Presley. In a then-unimaginable future, McCartney was to own the double bass thrummed on *Heartbreak Hotel*, but in 1956 he was just one of countless British youths who'd been so instantly 'gone' on the King's 78rpm UK chart unveiling that all he could think was that its maker was surely the greatest man ever to walk the planet. It was the same when Paul discovered Little Richard. In a succinct foreword to Richard's 1984 biography, he'd recollect, "The first song I ever sang in public was *Long Tall Sally* in a Butlin's holiday camp talent competition when I was 14."

> "The first time I really ever felt a tingle up my spine was when I saw Bill Haley and The Comets on the telly"
>
> PAUL MCCARTNEY

Of more insidious impact was Buddy Holly. While Paul was unable to attend the bespectacled Texan's show with his Crickets when their sole European tour reached Liverpool in March 1958, he'd studied Holly's fingers as they fretted chords and picked solos with unflappable ease on ITV's *Sunday Night At The London Palladium* that same month, and his early efforts at composition became less of a sideline after constant replays of Buddy and his boys' *Chirping Crickets*, a maiden LP consisting mostly of self-penned songs, tailored to lead singer Holly's elastic adenoids. Crucially, these demonstrated


A modern reissue of Paul's hollow-bodied Hofner Club 40, which was loaned to him by John Lennon

The Quarry Men perform at a wedding reception at Paul's Auntie Gin's house in 1958

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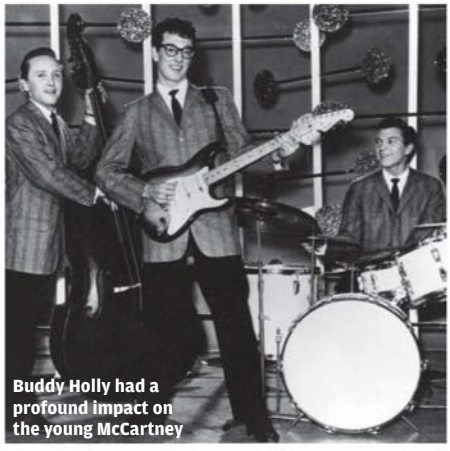
Buddy Holly had a profound impact on the young McCartney

that rock 'n' roll could be simultaneously forceful and romantic, and that it could evolve without getting too complex. Arguably, it was from this realisation that McCartney and Lennon were to evolve into one of the most outrageously successful songwriting partnerships of all time – although the main audience for their efforts then was the McCartneys' domestic tape recorder.

On these, Paul played either Jim's Spanish model or a Zenith Model 17 acoustic six-string, having exchanged the trumpet for it at Rushworth and Dreaper in the city centre. "The story goes that he couldn't play it because he was left-handed," recalled Jonathan Rushworth, great-great grandson of the music store's founder, "so he had to turn the strings round the other way." >

Paul's perfectionism led to him sometimes laying down the guitar tracks himself in the studio

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McCartney has always had a close affinity with the acoustic, and his playing features on tracks such as *Blackbird* and *Michelle*

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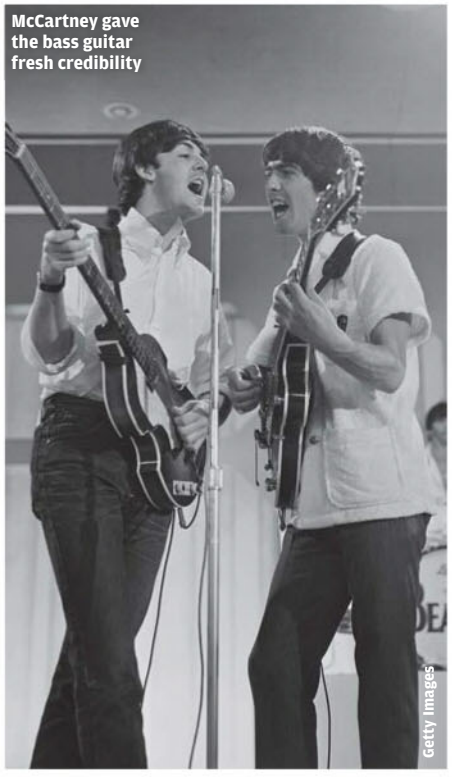

McCartney gave the bass guitar fresh credibility

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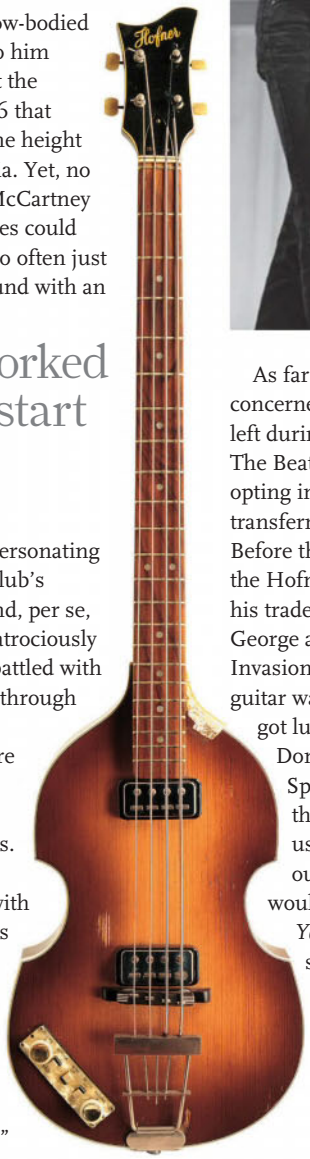
Once he had done so, Paul noticed that the highest string was too loose in the wider notch designed for the lowest one, until the insertion of a bit of matchstick. With the addition of a magnetic pickup near the bridge, it served as an 'electric guitar' from his first date as a Quarry Man – where, crippled by nerves, he made such a hash of an instrumental number that "it wiped me out as a lead guitar player that night" – until dropped, and then a hollow-bodied Hofner Club 40 loaned to him by Lennon, who'd bought the Rickenbacker Model 1996 that he'd still be plucking at the height of world-wide Beatlemania. Yet, no matter how contrasting McCartney and Lennon's chord shapes could be, Paul found himself too often just singing and gyrating around with an unplugged guitar, or impersonating Little Richard at a given club's worn-out piano. The sound, per se, was puny, yet harsh and atrociously distorted as The Beatles battled with amplifiers that were sent through speakers known to tear, explode and even catch fire because of power surges and the mismatch of British and German ohms. McCartney would recall that "If we had troubles with our overworked amplifiers – we had to plug two guitars into the same one – I'd just chuck it all in and start leaping all round the stage or rushing over to the piano and playing a few chords."

> "If we had troubles with our overworked amplifiers, I'd just chuck it in and start leaping all round the stage"
>
> PAUL MCCARTNEY

The Beatles' first season in Hamburg with drummer Pete Best (superseded in 1962 by Starr) and, on a newly-purchased Hofner 'President' bass, Stuart Sutcliffe.

As one rhythm guitarist too many in this line-up, Paul was strumming a sunburst six-string Rosetti Solid 7 semi-acoustic. "It was really just a good-looking piece of wood," he sighed, "It had a nice paint job, but it was a disastrous, cheap guitar." After Sutcliffe remained in Hamburg, an attempt was made to turn the Rosetti into a makeshift bass by restringing it with wires from a piano, but, with Stuart's return, Paul was happy to scrap this idea. "Bass was the instrument you got lumbered with," he said. "You didn't know a famous bass player. They were background people, so none of us was prepared to spend money on something like that."

Instead, he continued with the Rosetti, despite damage sustained when it was



The iconic Hofner 500/1 'violin' bass – dubbed the 'Beatle bass' or 'Cavern bass' – that became Paul's trademark instrument

As far as the group as a whole was concerned, matters mended when Sutcliffe left during 1961's dull and cool July, and The Beatles decided not to replace him, opting instead for the simpler expedient of transferring McCartney permanently to bass. Before the summer was out, he'd acquired the Hofner 'violin' model that was to be his trademark instrument after John, Paul, George and Ringo spearheaded the 'British Invasion' of world pop in 1964 – and the bass guitar was no longer "the instrument you got lumbered with". Indeed, according to Donald Hirst, of Melbourne group The Spinning Wheels, "McCartney gave the bass credibility. Before him, it was usually given to the fat boy, who stayed out of sight." From 1965, however, it would be Harrison's task to introduce *Yesterday* from the non-soundtrack side of the *Help!* album – "For Paul McCartney of Liverpool, opportunity knocks!" – which McCartney >

Artist: James Veck-Gilodi - Deaf Havana

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PAUL UNPLUGGED

Acoustic six-strings figured on Beatles discs for EMI from the beginning, namely *P.S. I Love You*, B-side of debut single *Love Me Do*. McCartney's first outing might have been on 1964's *A Hard Day's Night* LP's *I'll Be Back* finale. Purportedly, he, Harrison and Lennon all played acoustic six-strings on this track, and Paul was more prominent on *I'll Follow The Sun,* from *Beatles For Sale*.

The earliest all-acoustic Beatles opus was on the ***Help!*** album. Furthermore, the two-flute coda of *You've Got To Hide Your Love Away* was the first occasion when auxiliary musicians were hired for a Beatles session, predating *Yesterday*.

On the next collection, *Rubber Soul*, Paul's Epiphone Texan FT-79 was heard on *I'm Looking Through You* and *Michelle*. It was to feature, too, on *Here, There And Everywhere* (*Revolver*), *The Fool On The Hill* (*Magical Mystery Tour*) and *All Together Now* (*Yellow Submarine*).

Yet McCartney was to truly come into his own as an acoustic guitarist during *The White Album*, on *Rocky Racoon*, *I Will*, *Mother Nature's Son* and, most conspicuously, *Blackbird* (using a 1967 C.F. Martin D-28), on which the only other instrument was his tapping foot. One reviewer compared him to Tom Paxton, but *Blackbird* betrayed more of the arpeggio style purportedly demonstrated to Paul (and John) the previous February by Donovan, a fellow seeker of nirvana at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's yoga-ashram in the Himalayas. Less directly, it was derived from that of Davey Graham, John Renbourn and Bert Jansch, all-fingers-going denizens of Britain's folk scene, who also influenced, among others, George Harrison and Jimmy Page.

Other relevant Beatles selections worth mentioning are *Two Of Us* (with both Paul and John on acoustics) on *Let It Be*, and *Her Majesty*, the brief McCartney-only coda to *Abbey Road*, the subject decades later of an apparently impromptu performance during his slot at Party At The Palace, an extravaganza in London to commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Finally, prior to McCartney announcing his resignation from The Beatles in 1970, he spent much of the previous winter taping by multiple overdub an eponymous solo album in the privacy of his home. Overall, it captured a sketchy freshness, even a stark beauty at times. Certainly, its acoustic emphasis was much at odds with more intense offerings of the day, whether Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Man, Black Sabbath, Humble Pie and other headbangingly 'heavy' outfits or the 'pomp-rock' of ELP and Yes, castigated for preferring technique to instinct – and McCartney couldn't be accused of that.

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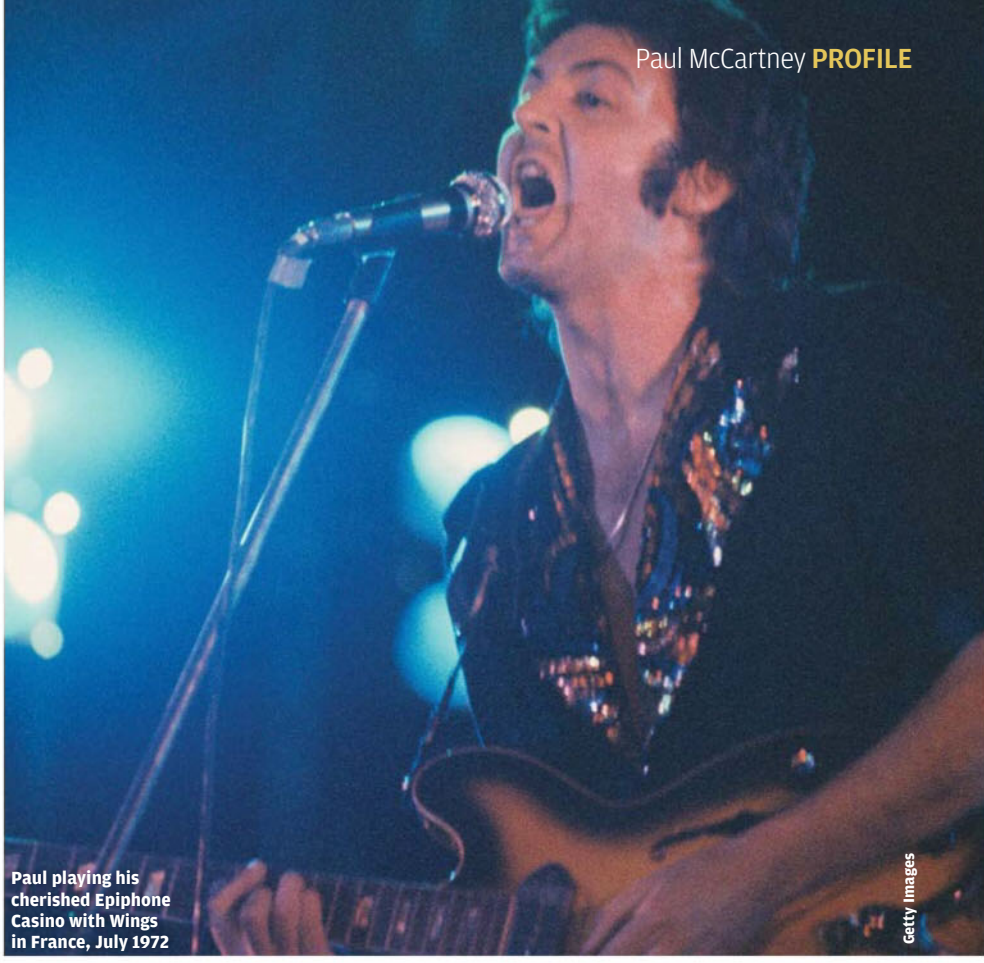
delivered to solely his own strumming of an Epiphone Texan FT-79 acoustic. No-one saw any purpose in taking on the road a string quartet like that hired for the session. Money was no object, it was only that any subtleties crammed into such a small spot were lost on what had become tribal gatherings rather than musical recitals.

It was expedient, too, for Harrison to learn parrot-fashion McCartney's lead lines to *Ticket To Ride* – which had emanated from a hollow-bodied Epiphone Casino, obtained on the recommendation of bluesman John Mayall, who'd noted it being twanged by the likes of Magic Sam and Otis Rush. Enduring as one of Paul's favourite guitars, his Casino was still being heard in concert and on disc at the turn of the century. He also still owns a single-pickup 1964 Fender Esquire from this period.

Another famous Casino user was Dave Davies, whose Kinks had superimposed Indian sounds onto pop's grid via 1965's *See My Friends* with its plaintive vocal and droning guitars. Dave would recall an encounter in a London club, the Scotch Of St. James, when McCartney said: "You bastards! How dare you! I should have made that record".

Paul also lent an intrigued ear to The Yardbirds' similar ventures into areas far removed from their R&B core through hits such as *Heart Full Of Soul, Evil Hearted You, Still I'm Sad, Shapes Of Things* and Over *Under Sideways Down,* all hybrids of instant familiarity and unpretentious musical innovation. Though, for example, a sitarist had been hired for *Heart Full Of Soul,* such ostentation was disregarded after Jeff Beck's guitar tone exhaled what was in pop terms a more pungent breath of the Orient.

Rehearsing *Step Inside Love* with Cilla Black, January 1968



Paul playing his cherished Epiphone Casino with Wings in France, July 1972

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Beck, Davies and perhaps other victims of the same passion – such as Dick Taylor of The Pretty Things and Ian 'Tich' Amey of Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich – left their mark, however involuntarily, on McCartney's lead guitar contributions (sometimes shared with Harrison and Lennon) to *Taxman*, *Good Morning Good Morning* (the final solo), *Fixing A Hole* and elsewhere on *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and – on *The White Album* – *Back In The USSR*, *Helter Skelter*, *Honey Pie* and *Martha My Dear*, plus the medley that closes 1969's *Abbey Road*. Displaying eclecticism and unpredictability in compatible amounts, his solos and passagework were constructed to integrate with the melodic and lyrical intent of a piece. This approach seemed attractively unfussy to anyone attuned to the more obvious aesthetics of a song than a reaction largely to underlying chord sequences with high-velocity flash – as dispensed, for instance, by Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck's predecessor in The Yardbirds, on *A Certain Girl*, one of the outfit's B-sides, in which his break has almost a separate life from the rest of the number.

Clapton was among catalytic familiars who added icing to the cake of *The White Album*. During the making of this, too, some have speculated that Paul began holding in his heart the possibility that The Beatles would be recalled as just the entity in which he'd cut his teeth before going on to bigger and better things. Indubitably, he was to rack up heftier sales and honours as an individual and as leader of Wings – most memorably with 1977's *Mull Of Kintyre* overtaking *She Loves You* as the UK's biggest-selling single – after the group was dissolved formally in the Chancery Division of the London High Court on 12 March 1971. However, most relevant to this discussion are his good, old-fashioned guitar-playing rearing up amid the fusion of down-tempo house and a vague strata of dub-reggae on 1993's *Strawberries Oceans Ships Forest* and 1998's more free-form and slow-moving ambient-techno of *Rushes* by The Firemen. Before this teaming up with modern dance paladin Martin 'Youth' Glover, nevertheless, McCartney had released *Choba B CCCP*, a USSR-only album of 13 favourite non-originals,mainly from the annals of classic rock.

If nothing else, Paul sounded as if he enjoyed revisiting them.

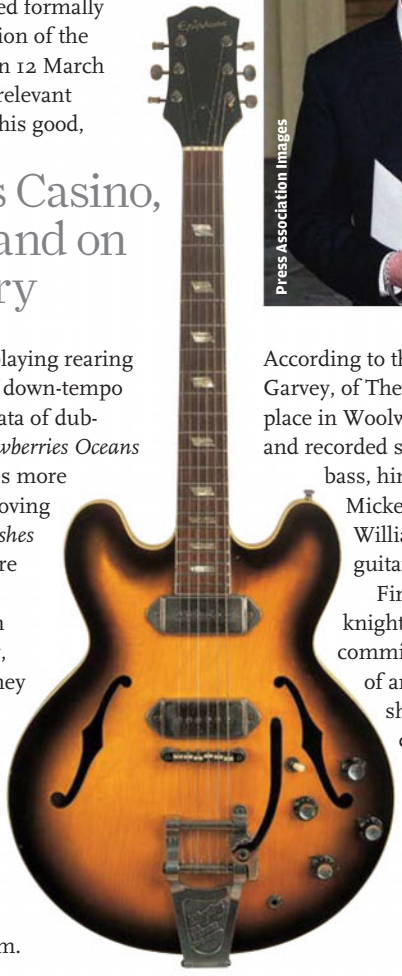
Press Association Images

Knighted for his services to music in 1997

One of Paul's favourite guitars, his Casino, was still being heard in concert and on disc at the turn of the century

According to the appointed bass player, Nick Garvey, of The Motors, "I went to a rehearsal place in Woolwich where Macca ran through and recorded several things with me on bass, him on guitar and "live" vocals, Mickey Gallagher on piano and Terry Williams on drums. Macca played guitar like it was easy as hell."

Finally, on receiving his knighthood in 1997, McCartney commissioned the designing of a coat of arms. It was to embrace four shapes resembling beetles, two circles representing records, the title of his Ecce Cor Meum oratorio, a singing Liver bird – and, of course, a guitar.



Paul acquired his Epiphone Casino on the recommendation of John Mayall

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- **PATCH CABLES** Various
- **POWER SUPPLY** Voodoo Lab Pedal Power II x2
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"I really enjoy creating cinematic mind-trip scores (new genre?), so I began looking at pedals as voices. If I'm going to create electronic music that is secretly organic and created predominantly on strings, I need a lot of personalities, from bi-polar to passive-aggressive! It's easy to get lost, so the Rainger FX Dr Freakenstein, the Jam Pedals Red Muck and my '91 DigiTech Whammy serve as the perfect opening palate."

Tell us a little about the journey...
"I was a straight-to-the amp player for 10 of my 19 years... and then I heard Tom Morello. The "disregard for the tradition of the instrument" (to quote Tom) was refreshing, if not a mind bender. I still have a large Delta roots side, but late at night with the lights oddly dimmed, I'm up trying to find sounds like a pterodactyl humping a squeak toy, or maybe Mario going down a green pipe. Doing so requires copious amounts of time looking through *Guitar & Bass*, researching and hunting new creations from the many amazing builders out there."

Is there anything else you're looking to add?
"I'm always looking out for David Rainger's next creation, and I've got my eye on the new Obscura pedal from DigiTech – hopefully it's not just a clever name..."

What guitars and amps do you use?
"My main guitars are a Gibson ES-355 with Lollar P-94s and a Gretsch White Falcon that my beautiful wife bought me long ago. I run through an '88 Marshall Silver Jubilee 2555 and a Fender '59 Bassman or Orange Rockerverb 100 combo."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"I'm not the 'reads the manual' guy. I rarely can find the manual 10 minutes after opening the box. So if you're like me, stay away from pedals that have more knobs than a 70s Boeing cockpit – it's more about finding the sweet spot between all the players (guitar, amp and pedal). Lastly, when you play, make mistakes. Invite them, record them... If your goals include finding strange sounds, think less and feel more!"

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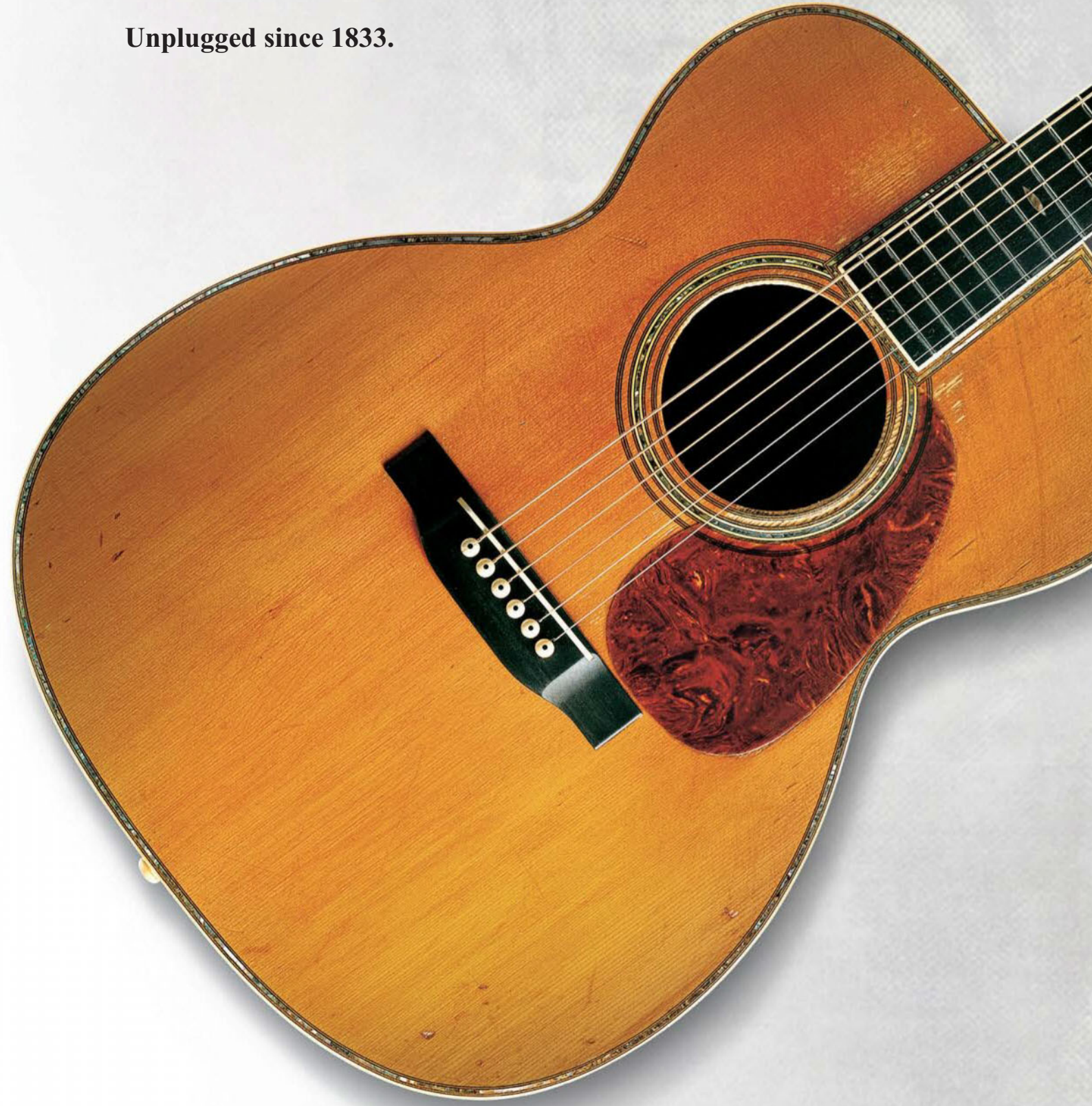

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

ALEXI LAIHO

The Children Of Bodom guitarist talks us through the nine records closest to his heart

Finnish vocalist, composer and guitarist Alexi Laiho is the main man in melodic death-metal band Children Of Bodom, whose ninth album, *I Worship Chaos*, is out in October. Taster track *Morrigan* got 106,000 plays in its first five days online. With fellow guitarist Roope Latvala leaving the ranks in May, Alexi now handles all guitar duties and will be leading Children Of Bodom on a UK tour in November. An endorsee of ESP since 2003, he has a series of signature guitars, unashamedly Randy Rhoads-influenced in shape. One passive pickup, one volume knob and a Floyd Rose, and he's good to go. With accolades including the Metal Hammer Golden Gods shredder award under his belt, this is one fast-fingered Finn you should keep an eye out for. Here, Laiho reveals the albums that shaped his musical evolution...

Guns N' Roses
APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

"One of the records I grew up listening to. It was released (in 1987) at a very important time for me; I was influenced by Slash from an early age, before I started playing the guitar. It wasn't only the guitars, but the whole band – their attitude and music. Axl Rose, his stage presence, everything... he is one of my all-time heroes. *Appetite* is the perfect rock album."

Dimmu Borgir
ENTHRONE DARKNESS TRIUMPHANT

"A black metal album that was very different at that time (1997). Black metal was considered primitive, but this was something else... We opened for Dimmu Borgir when this album was out the first time, and that was a really significant gig for us: that's why it's an important album for me too. I recommend hearing *Spellbound (By The Devil)*."

Stone Sour
COME WHAT(EVER) MAY

"I don't listen to a lot of new music, but when you speak about the new generation of hard rock this is the album to hear. It shows hard rock still exists and can still be awesome, modern and with a lot of attitude. Listen to the track *30/30-150*, which I understand grabbed a Grammy nomination. This is a real old-school album – particularly the guitars."

Metallica
METALLICA

"I picked this even though it's not the first Metallica album I heard. That was *...And Justice For All*; I was nine or 10, and I loved the crap out of it. Even after I heard that and *Master Of Puppets*, *Kill 'Em All* blew me away. It was harder... so raw. It's so angry, you can feel it. One of the most influential albums on the thrash-metal movement, and still one of my favourites."

Sepultura
ARISE

"The first time I heard something I could call extreme metal. I'd heard Metallica, Anthrax... but this was the first time I heard rock with vocals that are not melodic, that are pure insanity. I'd never heard anything like that. It was a very big deal because I then started getting into harder music – death metal, stuff like that."

Mötley Crüe
SHOUT AT THE DEVIL

"Another of those bands I grew up with in the 80s. I was into bands some might now call 'hair metal', but Mötley Crüe were different to the others. They were way more pissed off, especially on this album. It's just so raw, and definitely more punk rock compared to later albums like *Dr Feelgood* – it's got an amazing vibe, and that's why I love it."

Steve Vai
PASSION AND WARFARE

"At the time this was released, I decided I really wanted to start playing guitar. In fact, I was obsessed with the idea, so when I heard this album and saw the video for the song *For The Love Of God*, I was like... 'holy shit!'. It just blew me away. This was the first time I ever heard Steve Vai, and he's still one of my favourite guitar players all these years later."

Andrew W.K.
PARTY HARD

"Something different... it's here because it makes me smile. If I'm having a bad day, I pop that in the player and it kinda saves my day, so that's enough reason to include it. I played with Andrew once; we happened to be appearing in different rooms in the same venue, in Milwaukee, and I ended up playing with him... which was actually pretty awesome!"

Ozzy Osbourne
NO REST FOR THE WICKED

"This was the first time I knowingly heard anything by Zakk Wylde... I had already been influenced by Randy Rhoads and Jake E Lee, but I had managed to miss out Zakk. When I first heard it, I thought 'holy fuck, this is awesome'. It's a very strong album, all the songs are really good, my favourite Ozzy album – and that's really saying something!"

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"R&B nowadays is Rihanna and Chris Brown – for us it's Ike and Tina Turner, it's Chuck Berry"

AC/DC, The Who, Lenny Kravitz, Bon Jovi – all these greats have had the pleasure of Vintage Trouble opening for them. Now, after four hardworking years, 'everybody's favourite support band' have finally cut their second album, *1 Hopeful Rd*

Story **Michael Heatley**

Timothy White

"We started with 37 tunes," says bassist Rick Barrio Dill, "pared them down and only 12 made the record. We wanted to make a real LP that was a journey from start to finish, the best songs we could. And I think we've done that.

"It's a big difference from the old album [2011's *The Bomb Shelter Sessions*]," remarks guitarist Nalle Colt. "We brought in a real producer this time, Don Was. It was very song-focused. I tried thinking about guitar solos more, to go into almost David Gilmour (territory), trying to write out solos and find really melodic things; this other side of me that I wanted to bring out, so I'm really proud of it."

Swedish-born Colt reveals that half the songs are stage favourites and the other half are new – "which is nice," he says, "because you get the energy you have from the newest babies, but at the same time we had so many that were road-tested, things lots of fans will know, that should, could have been put on a second record years ago.

"*My Heart Won't Fall Again* and *Soul Serenity* are my two favourite new ones, and two older ones are *Strike Your Light* and *Run Like The River*. We've been closing our set with *Strike Your Light* for a while – it's a monster, upbeat thing that was inspired by our fans, the Troublemakers, in LA and London, who gave us the ability to think that we could fly and that, if we fell, they could catch us."

Taylor made

Songs, explains Colt's bassist buddy, "come from anywhere. Sometimes, Ty (singer Ty Taylor) will have the core of an idea – he writes the lyrics – and he'll bring it in and then we completely destroy it and >

Ty Taylor is a captivating frontman with a voice that's unique in modern music

Getty Images

turn it into something else. *Angel City* came out in an hour; inspiration comes from all different angles."

Coincidentally, both men have recently changed their instruments of choice. Fender man Barrio Dill's transition from Jazz to Precision was sudden and unexpected. "It's funny, because I was a Jazz guy for so long – still am, in a lot of ways. But I got into [James] Jamerson and [Bob] Babbitt and that Motown sound...

"I've got a '62 with a slightly smaller neck, that Fender American Design Experience did for me. I got into a P Bass because, with Richard [Danielson]'s 26-inch kick drum I thought the Jazz was the way to go because it was coming up over the top of it sonically. My whole mission is to be heard and less to be felt, because you feel Richard already. But the more I dug in, started rolling off bottom and making it more percussive, the P Bass answered that call."

Gretsch love

Colt is a recent convert to Gretsch, having forsaken his lifetime squeeze, the Les Paul. That said, there's more than a hint of Gibson about his new love which, he reveals, took a year and a half to perfect. "It's my signature guitar, and I'm very excited. Luckily, I got it before the album was recorded, and 99 per cent of the guitar on that is the Gretsch. It's based on a '54 Duo Jet.

"I sat down with Steve Stern, who works for the Gretsch Custom Shop, I showed him >

ACOUSTICALLY SPEAKING

Colt's acoustic of choice is a Taylor. "It's on *Soul Serenity*, at the end of the new record," he says. "Andy Powers, the master luthier, built it. It doesn't have a name yet, it just says 'prototype', but I'm really proud to play it. I'm grateful to Taylor for being so supportive and building me guitars that play so well."

While Barrio Dill played a Guild on the band's *Swing House Acoustic Sessions* EP [check out the video on their website], he has reservations about acoustic bass on record. "The Guild is amazing in the room, but to get that to translate to recording is a different story. I use a [Fender] Kingman on the road backstage, and have used it in radio sessions, but when we did an acoustic thing for Obama [they played presidential benefit dates in 2012] Nalle used an acoustic guitar and I used a P Bass with flatwounds and my little flip-top amp. I love the sound of an acoustic bass if you're live... but that combination sounded better, dare I say it, on record."

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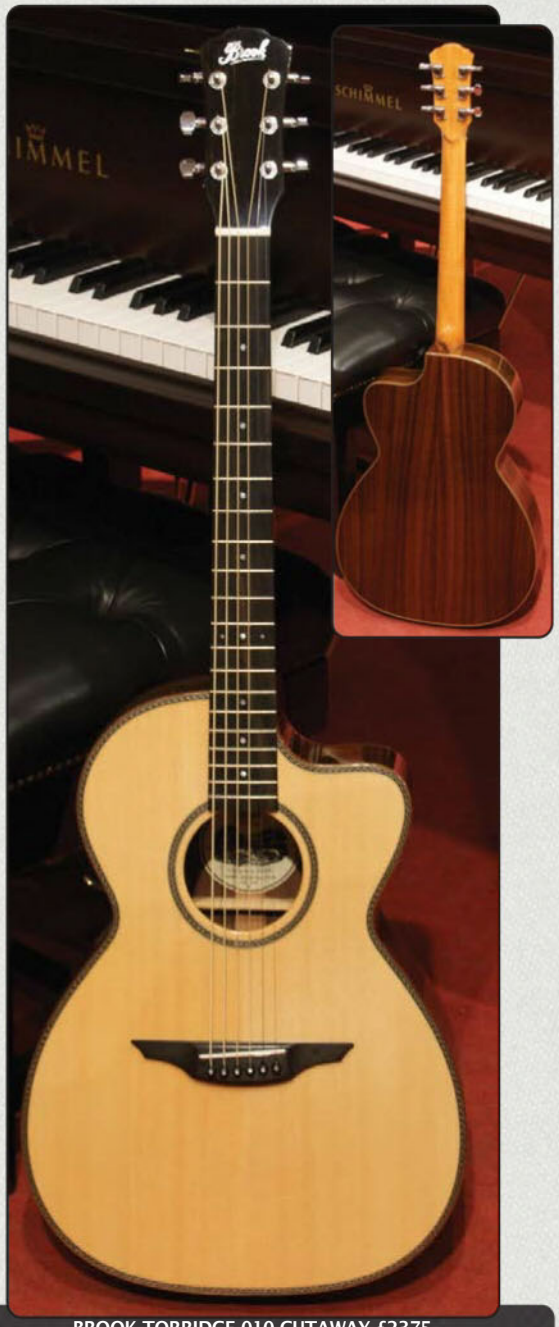

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Vintage Trouble perform at John Varvatos Bowery in New York in April 2013

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The Vintage Trouble live experience is a frenetic, high-energy one

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Left to right: Ty Taylor, Nalle Colt, Richard Danielson, Rick Barrio Dill

my Les Paul and we talked about what we could do. I was intrigued about getting a hollowbody guitar, because I'd always wanted to get that Scotty Moore/Chuck Berry kind of tone.

"We ended up with a weird hybrid between a Les Paul and a Duo Jet. The pickups look like Filter'Trons, but they're made by Monty's Guitars in London – they're humbuckers, and it's wired inside like a Les Paul; we took off the master volume. The neck is basically a straight Les Paul neck. It's got a Bigsby tremolo, 'cos I thought if you have a Gretsch you gotta have a Bigsby on it! With that, there's less tension, so I can use heavier strings – .11 to .54.

"I put a TonePros bridge on it and it ended up being a great recording and touring guitar. I'm all for trying to find my own personal tone, something that sticks out as my own thing. The Gretsch really brings that out, so I'm happy to say it's my main guitar now."

The name Vintage Trouble suggests a band with an eye for the building blocks of rock – instruments and amps that help them create a vibe. "It's a philosophy," Barrio Dill explains. "We definitely come from the 50s sensibility, in terms of trying to obtain that timeless approach to songwriting, and the original styles rhythm and blues, soul and early rock 'n' roll came from. R&B nowadays is Rihanna and Chris Brown – for us it's Ike and Tina Turner, it's Chuck Berry."

> "It's a philosophy. We come from the 50s sensibility, in terms of trying to obtain that timeless approach to songwriting"
>
> RICK BARRIO DILL

Barrio Dill's choice of studio amplification – a 1967 fliptop B-15 Ampeg – is certainly vintage. He also had an Aguilar DB 750 with a 6x10 cab, and both were mic'd up. The final component was a DI box built, it is claimed, out of components used in the Motown desk in Hitsville, and sourced by Don Was. These were used in combination, depending on the song.

"Live, it's Aguilar all the way," Barrio Dill explains. "They're like Mercedes, in my opinion; wherever I am in the world, I just need to look at an Aguilar DB750 and a DB 4x12 turned on its side and that's it. That can be my soundcheck – I don't even need to turn it on. If I go to Australia, if I go to Japan, I know exactly what it's going to sound like.

"I don't really use any effects live, though I have used an [Aguilar] Agro [bass overdrive] pedal on this AC/DC run, just for a little extra teeth in a stadium situation. But most times, I pride myself on using a P Bass with flatwounds, volume and tone on the bass and a tuner."

THE MIGHTY WAS

Producer Don Was is also, of course, a bass legend, but what's he like to work with? "He's like a Buddha," says Barrio Dill: "He promotes your best view, he doesn't try to put him on you at all. That's the mark of a true leader, a true inspirationalist – they look at what you do and try to make that blossom and flower the best they possibly can."

Surprisingly, the younger man was first to offer a bass-playing tip. "I have a mute on the nut of my bass; it's one of those FretWraps they sent me to try, and it's kinda cool on some of the ballads we do live. When we started hanging out, he said 'What's that thing?' and it was cool to see the FretWrap I gave him on his bass when he did some TV... 'I gave Don Was that FretWrap!'"

David vs Goliath

The shows with AC/DC saw a mismatch on the guitar amplification side, with Colt's pair of Lazy J amps dwarfed by Angus Young's massive Marshalls. "I love it – those two tiny 20-watt tweed amps growl like crazy," he enthuses. "For this tour, Jesse [Hoff] made me a head that I use for the guitar 'Leslie'. So I have three Lazy Js running at all times."

The guitar 'Leslie' he is referring to is a Fender Vibratone, which helps him thicken the sound of the band's solitary guitar. "This time, I really brought it into the mix as almost a secondary instrument. We emphasised it a lot – put headphones on for *Another Man's Words* and you get almost an organ vibe."

His pedalboard, the guitarist explains, has slimmed down somewhat over recent years. >

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Colt with his lifelong guitar love, the Les Paul

Utrecht Music & Arts

Playing with Joss Stone in Boston, Massachusetts, in October 2012

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"I want to home in on the guitar. You can get so much tone out of tone controls and volume knobs..."

The latest effect didn't make the new record, but Nalle is raving about the SoloDallas Schaffer Replica, a wireless unit Angus Young, by coincidence, has used as a clean boost. "You can turn down the guitar and really compress it into the amp. That's something I learned from touring with Brian May; he got it from Rory Gallagher.

"It brought out such a warm, beautiful sound, from clean to madly rough overdriven, just using the volume on my guitar. Now I never turn it off. It's an incredible little thing – it makes your amp so dynamic."

The other effect he runs all the time is a Strymon El Capistan tape echo for a cool slapback effect. "I used to listen to Scotty Moore, and it was all about tape echo to create that really nice space," he says. "It works really well for rhythm guitar.

"Other than that, I have very few pedals. I have a [LovePedal] Pickle Vibe that I didn't use on the AC/DC tour, 'cos we don't play the songs, and a Voodoo Lab Proctavia pedal to get that dirty Hendrix tone. It's cool to bring out on an old song called *Total Strangers*, because it really cuts through."

Stadium rock

The band's recent tour with AC/DC saw them play in Austria to 120,000 people – the largest show the country had ever staged. "It's like the Olympic Games," says Colt. "You have 45 minutes to convince these people... [laughs], so it gives me a huge amount of adrenalin. It's been a great journey so far. I think we've played to 1.4 million people in a month and a half! The one thing we learned is that anything you do with your body you gotta do tenfold, because to most people in the stadium you're a tiny little Lego figure. Movements express your energy, and it comes naturally to us."

> "I can watch Pete Townshend playing 51 shows in a row, I can see Angus play, Lenny Kravitz... It's like Christmas every night"
>
> NALLE COLT

Colt's also enjoyed what he calls 'masterclasses' from some of the best in the business. "I can sit and watch Pete Townshend playing for 51 shows in a row, now I can see Angus play, Lenny Kravitz and all these guys – true performers. I try to learn what they do, how they do it, why they do it and what I can make my own. I'm so honoured... it's like Christmas every night!"

The road to Wembley

For Barrio Dill, playing Wembley with AC/DC was an achievement. "But we're barely at base camp staring up at Mount Everest," he contends. "When you look at their 40 years and all the fans they have, singing their hits for two hours, it's inspiring because you realise there's so much work for us to do – and so much hopefully in front of us.

"One thing we have going for us is that we are a live band first and foremost. You come see us and we promise we're going to leave you with something. That's a currency you can't fake nowadays, and I think people see that... We'll carry on trying to deliver that as far and wide as possible."

The last word goes to Colt: "AC/DC have sold out every show on this tour. Hopefully, we can start getting closer to doing the stages they are doing. It's a massive carrot in front of us. We're learning how to take an audience of 100,000 and make it feel like a little sweaty blues club – then you've done your duty."

LISTEN UP

VINTAGE TROUBLE
The Bomb Shelter Sessions (2011)
Their debut album was recorded live in just three days and is a raw and raucous listen, capturing the spirit of Led Zeppelin and Chuck Berry.

VINTAGE TROUBLE
1 Hopeful Road (2015)
Vintage Trouble's second album demonstrates some masterful songwriting, covering blues, soul, country and R&B.

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WILLIE WATSON

Endorsed by the likes of David Rawlings and Ry Cooder, Willie Watson cut his teeth as a member of Old Crow Medicine Show. Having since gone solo, he's thriving as the main man...

Story **Michael Heatley** | Photography **Monkey Bird**

WHEN NO LESS a man than Ry Cooder calls you someone to watch, and David Rawlings not only signs you to his label but drafts you into his band, you're doing something right. Willie Watson's just finished his second solo tour of Britain, having made his name as a long-time member of Old Crow Medicine Show.

Watson's debut solo album, *Folk Singer Volume 1*, produced by Rawlings, found him alternating between acoustic guitar and banjo, tackling material by Leadbelly (*Stewball*), Memphis Slim (*Mother Earth*), Utah Phillips (*Rock Salt And Nails*) and more. Only in his mid-30s after 17 years' service in OCMS, he's revelling in being centre stage. According to Cooder, Watson "handles the instruments just right and sings like a cotton mill hand with no benefits... In the young generation of old-time music-makers, I'm putting all my money on Willie." *G&B* advises readers to gamble responsibly – but if Americana floats your boat, then listen to Uncle Ry's advice. *Folk Singer Volume 1* is a sound investment.

Q It's your second solo tour of Britain. Do people still associate you with your old group?

"A lot of people that show up have the (solo) record by now. There's a handful of people at each show that brought a friend who's never heard of me, and they usually have a good time; I get some new fans out of that."

Q Do you play any of the old material?

"There's a few Old Crow Medicine Show songs that I'll sneak in there sometimes, but I pretty much stay away from that. I do sing *CC Rider* and a few others once in a while, but mostly it's from the record [*Folk Singer Volume 1*]. I don't sing all of those songs [every night], I'll leave one off here and there – the show is longer than the record, so there's more material."

Q You chose to interpret traditional songs because writing new material under pressure was daunting – are you writing now?

"Not really. Once in a while, I'll have an idea, jot down a line, but I haven't been genuinely inspired. And I don't want to write about things I don't know about – I want to be honest and write about things that are relevant to me, that I've had experience with. I don't want to force it."

Q What instruments do you take on the road?

"My Larrivee OM-1, which I've had for quite a long time, all through my Old Crow Days, is what I still play now. It's pretty beat up. I took the pickguard off it when I got it; It came with a transparent square pickguard, which was like a giant piece of clear tape they stuck on there. So I ripped that off, 'cos it looked awful. And I have a 1957 Gibson

Watson's solo work is steeped in traditional American folk music

Guitar came first for Willie, before he progressed to the banjo

RB-100 banjo. It's an archtop; the tone ring is raised up and part of the head sticks out a bit."

Q Did you learn guitar first? Which was harder?

"I started playing guitar round about 11, 12, and didn't seriously start playing banjo until I was 17, 18. It was no different than anything else; it was just as hard. It takes a lot of practice. A lot of people think they can pick up a banjo, and if they're a guitar player it'll be easier. It is true in some ways because (it helps) if your left hand is agile enough and it knows how to fret chords, but the right hand is another thing altogether; it doesn't have anything to do with guitar-playing. Throw all that out of the window!"

Q How would you describe your banjo-playing style?

"Clawhammer is what it's called. There were a lot of banjo players around Ithaca, in Tompkins County, that played that style, so I was exposed to it at an early age. Clawhammer is more closely related to Africans and the way they played when they brought it from Africa."

Q How is playing with the Dave Rawlings Machine different to solo?

"I've always loved Dave and Gillian (Welch), and Dave's guitar playing is something I was drawn to at an early age. I first heard those guys in 1994 or '95 when I was about 15, I had a copy of *Revival* and immediately liked it. I didn't realise how unique it was. They like to have me around for singing, we sing real good together... As far as guitar-playing goes, I always wondered why they had me play guitar, because Gillian plays such good, solid rhythm, but they assure me that it sounds a lot better with both of us. Me and Gill play the same stuff, maybe with a few different capo positions. If she's playing a C chord, maybe I'll capo up and play in the G position on the fifth fret to get a full sound that complements each other."

Q Are you still progressing as a player?

"I'm always learning, especially with guitar. It took me a long time to not break strings at every show. In Old Crow Medicine Show, my right hand would strike the guitar in such a way that I'd break a G string every three songs. I didn't know how to hit it right. I don't want to say it was wrong, because it did create a certain sound that worked well, but if you were to take me out of that band and put me in a bluegrass band I wouldn't have lasted long. I feel I've got a lot better."

Q What's your plan for the future?

"We're going to work on *Folk Singer Volume 2* and put that out. And I guess I'll keep on touring. I enjoy it, but I've been touring a lot and I'm burnt out. I've not found a lot of songs for the next record, but we have a backlog."

Q Would you consider making *Volume 2* more elaborate?

"The way *Volume 1* sounds is the way I sound. There wasn't anything deliberate about it... People think there's all this thought put into it. It's not the case. I'm just singing songs, doing what I do."

AND ANOTHER THING... Willie discovered a big vocal influence, Roy Orbison, when he heard roots supergroup the Traveling Wilburys... little realising his illustrious 60s past!

LISTEN UP

WILLIE WATSON

Folk Singer Volume 1 (2014)

Watson's debut solo release features 10 traditional numbers handpicked from the American folk songbook, played with simple sincerity and sung with an emotional edge.

OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW

Big Iron World (2006)

An album that Willie made with Old Crow Medicine Show before his unexpected 2011 departure from the band. Produced by David Rawlings, with Gillian Welch on drums.

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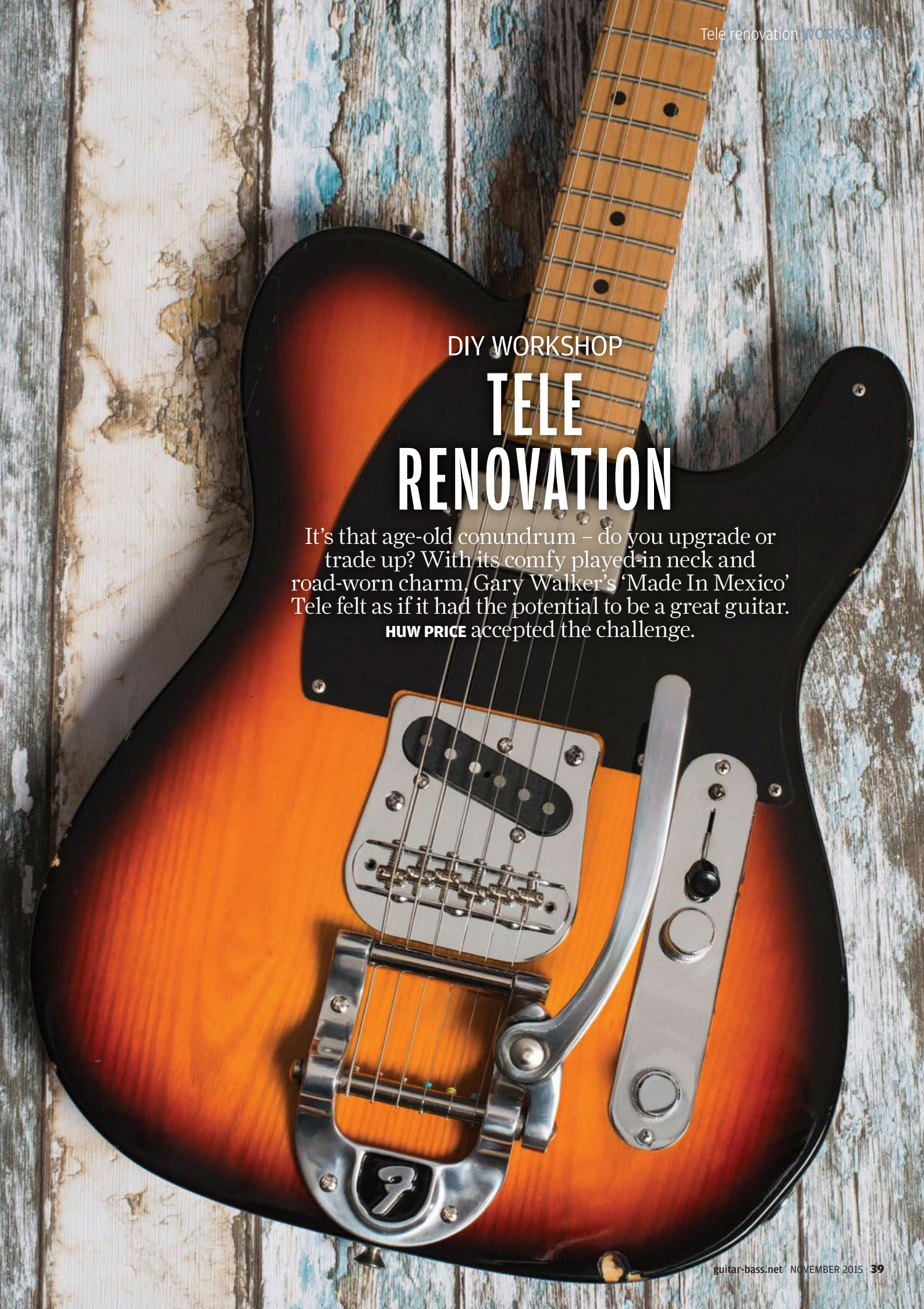


DIY WORKSHOP

TELE RENOVATION

It's that age-old conundrum – do you upgrade or trade up? With its comfy played-in neck and road-worn charm, Gary Walker's 'Made In Mexico' Tele felt as if it had the potential to be a great guitar. **HUW PRICE** accepted the challenge.

1 This 'Keef' set from Monty's Guitars comprises a Full Monty Tele bridge pickup and a PAF replica humbucker for the neck position

2 The Bigsby B5 kit for Telecasters has the 'F' brand and includes a replacement bridge plate and an offset-style rocking bridge

3 You can buy Tele pickguards with a humbucker cut-out, but Allparts UK's ones are three-ply. The next best option was a single-ply Esquire guard, which meant cutting the hole for the Monty's PAF

4 Placing capos at the first and 15th frets allows you to assess the amount of neck relief

There are so many great-looking, acoustically-resonant and affordable guitars that are crying out for some new pickups or improved hardware to bring out their full potential. Planning the upgrades, researching the parts and putting it all together can be a rewarding experience, and if you choose your parts wisely you can end up with a fantastic guitar without spending a fortune.

Gary liked the idea of keeping a humbucker in the neck position, along with a five-way selector switch, but the stock pickups were fairly nondescript. The humbucker sounded a tad dark and boomy and the bridge a bit shrill and thin. So the decision was made to go with a PAF and a Full Monty from Monty's Guitars 1.

As a Gretsch fan, Gary also fancied having a Bigsby to waggle. Various Bigsby and bridge options were considered before he decided on a B5 Fender Kit 2.

The factory pickguard had not aged gracefully. The three-ply look wasn't great and the cut-out for the humbucker was oversized. Gary decided a thin one-ply black pickguard from Allparts would spruce things up 3. But before starting, there was a playability issue that needed to be sorted.

Neck pains

The neck had developed a fairly substantial up-bow, so there was too much relief and the action was unpleasantly high. To gauge neck relief, place two capos on the guitar – one at the first fret and the other near the body join 4. Check for the gap between the strings and the top of the seventh and eighth frets.

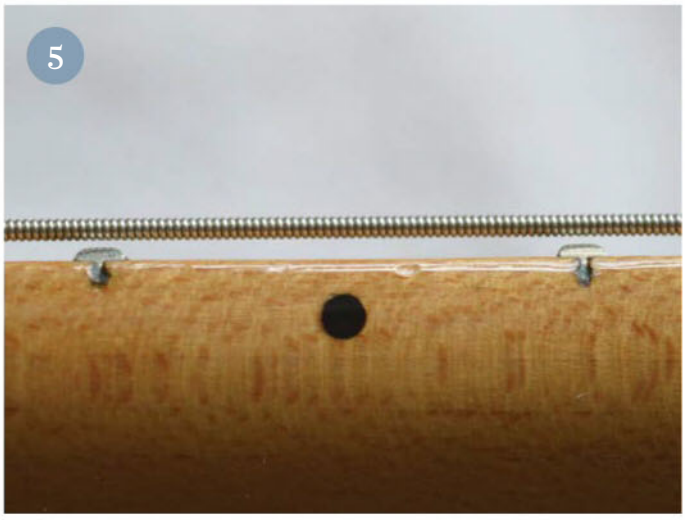
Opinions differ as to the ideal amount of relief, but a gap of approximately a millimetre or more may indicate a problem that the truss rod can't fix 5. Truss rods are fitted to set the right amount of neck relief, so they are intended for minor adjustments rather than correcting structural issues.

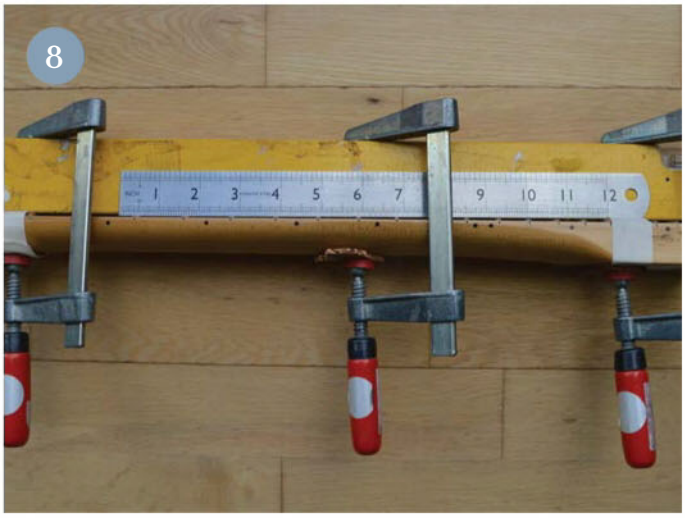
Cranking up the truss rod as far as it will go is not the remedy. In fact, you may strip the truss rod thread or even snap the rod itself. I could tell that this neck's truss rod was already very tight, so an alternative remedy was needed.

One method to cure an up-bow is to slacken off the truss rod then bend the neck to straighten it – or even introduce a slight back-bow. Then you can tighten the truss rod back up to clamp the neck in place. If you're lucky, it may stay there.

A spirit level was clamped onto the neck at each end, using cork pads for protection 6. A metal ruler was placed onto the frets to assess the extent of the up-bow and identify the deepest point. In this case, the gap was widest around the eighth fret 7.

A third clamp was placed with the top jaw contacting the top of the spirit level and the bottom jaw





under the eighth fret. As this third clamp was tightened, the centre part of the neck bent upwards towards the spirit level and the truss rod was brought back up to snug 8. This technique may not work every time, but it's easy to try it yourself. It may save you luthier fees – and save your truss rod, too.

Strip down

Before drilling any holes, or doing anything irreversible, I needed to check that all the new parts would fit. All the hardware and electronics had to be de-soldered from the controls and removed 9. The old-school jack cup was left in situ, because they're a nightmare to fit. I simply coiled up the jack wires and tucked them away inside the control cavity ready for reassembly.

Centre point

Never assume the centre of the body always corresponds with the centre line of the neck, because things don't always line up quite as they should. To establish this guitar's true centre line, I attached two strips of masking tape across the body in front and behind the bridge area. Placing a long metal ruler tight along the bass side of the fingerboard, I drew lines across the masking tape where the ruler passed over the body.

I repeated the process for the treble side, then measured identical distances from the 12th fret to the marker lines for both sides and marked the points on the lines. To establish the centre point, simply draw lines between the marks, then use a ruler to determine the halfway point of each and join the two centre points with another line 10.

Dry run

The Allparts pickguard went on first, but before it would fit properly, I had to file away some of the plastic because the neck was a bit too wide. Once in position, the screw holes lined up fairly nicely, although the replacement pickguard required three fewer screws.

The control plate was a few millimetres off, so the easiest solution was to plug both screw holes and drill new ones after repositioning the plate 11. For this, I usually take a chunky matchstick and round over the square corners using a Stanley knife blade as a scraper. With some wood glue inside the screw hole, simply tap in the matchstick and snap it off, leaving a few millimetres proud of the surface. Once the glue has dried, carefully trim it flush with the top using a Stanley blade 12.

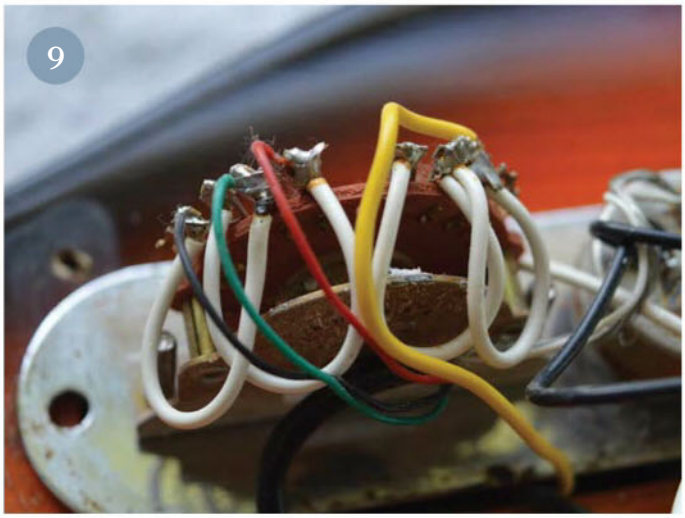
Unlike the original bridge, the Bigsby bridge plate is held on with three screws behind the saddles rather than four, and with two further screw holes in front of the saddles. After establishing the centre line, the middle screw hole behind the saddles was positioned over the line 13. >

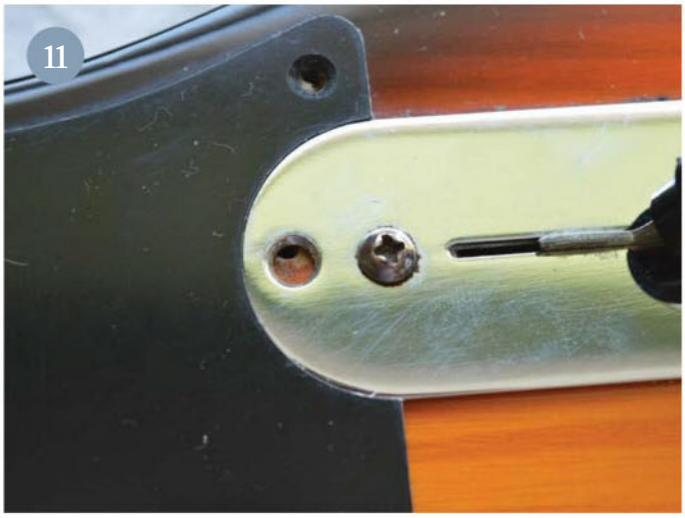
5 The wide gap between the tops of the frets and the string around the seventh fret is excessive

6 Using cork pads for protection, a spirit level is clamped along the centre line of the fingerboard. The pads create a space between the frets and the bottom of the spirit level

7 Resting a metal ruler along the frets gives you a clear indication of the neck's straightness

8 A clamp under the eighth fret can be tightened to straighten the neck or induce a back-bow. Once this is done, you can bring the truss rod up to snug and remove the middle clamp. If you're lucky, the neck will hold straight





9 Always record the wiring layout before you start taking things apart. You can draw yourself a diagram, or better still, take some pictures using your phone's camera. Gary's Tele had complicated five-way switching

10 When fitting new hardware, it's essential to establish the centre line of the guitar

11 The pickguard was a decent fit, but the control plate no longer lined up with the original screw holes

12 Matchsticks are a cheap, easy solution when you need to plug small screw holes

Having the pickguard in situ allowed me to square up the bridge plate, and I found it best to have the pickup mounted in the plate. It was vital to ensure the pickup didn't foul the sides of the pickup rout and it was free to move for setting the height. Once I was happy, I marked the position of the centre screw, then removed the bridge and filled the old screw holes. I did this because the new screw holes would be close to the old ones, and I didn't want cracks to occur in the body.

Filling the unwanted screw holes provided extra structural solidity. Again, I used matchsticks, but since the screw holes were countersunk, I followed up with some Milliput epoxy resin filler and set the body aside for the glue and resin to set.

Cutting the pickguard

With the pickguard attached to the body, I applied masking tape in the pickup area, established the centre line and marked out the position for the pickup **14**. A bona fide luthier would probably rout the hole using a template. Instead, I found the drill bit that best matched the corners of the cover and drilled four holes in the pickguard – one for each corner. A jeweller's saw was used to cut out the hole, and I cut a millimetre or so inside the marked lines.

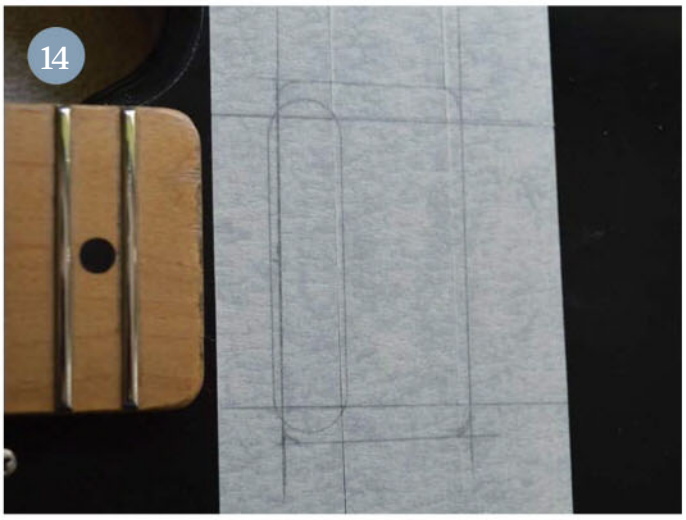
To get straight and smooth lines, I clamped the plastic to a piece of wood with a machine-cut edge. The wood lines up along the marked lines and a Stanley knife blade is used to to shave the plastic flush with the wood edge **15**. After drilling the pickup screw holes, I removed the film from the front of the pickguard, mounted the pickup and screwed down the pickguard.

Fitting the Bigsby

I began by drilling a pilot hole for the centre screw I marked earlier, then I loosely fixed the bridge plate using that single screw. This allowed me to turn the plate back and forth to get it squared up with the pickguard **16**. Once I was happy with the positioning, I tightened the screw fully, then marked out the positions for the four remaining screws.

The rocking bridge is mounted in thimbles, which press into the body, so 9mm diameter holes must be drilled. With the bridge plate position established, I placed masking tape under the plate and marked the position of the thimbles. After the centre points had been marked, I used a bradawl bit to drill the holes **17** **18**.

Traditional Telecasters have a ground wire under the bridge plate, but this Mexican model had a solder tag clamped between the plate and one of the height adjustment screw springs. This bridge assembly doesn't make contact with the plate. The instructions suggest bending a short length of unwound G string to a right angle and using the cup to wedge it into the hole. It sits under



the bridge and provides electrical continuity between the strings and ground 19. The Bigsby kit contains a length of red twine to help position the vibrato section itself. You tie two lengths of the twine to the outer Bigsby pins, pass them under the front roller and tie them onto the E string tuner posts.

The basic idea is that the twine – and the strings – should follow the straightest path from the vibrato, over the bridge saddles and to the tuners 20. Once I was happy, I marked the screw positions, drilled the holes and attached the vibrato.

Bridge

This was the first time I'd fitted a Bigsby kit to a Tele, and the instructions cover only the basics. For instance, there's no advice on which way round to fit the bridge, and it was only at the last moment I realised it would be preferable to have the intonation screws on the pickup side. Look online and you'll see bridges attached both ways, but if the intonation screws are on the vibrato side, it's hard to reach them with a screwdriver.

Start by setting the intonation screws to 'ballpark' positions and adjust the saddle heights so the tops of the intonation screws line up with the curve of the bridge base. This gives you a radius of approximately 241mm (9.5 inches). If you set the saddles higher, the intonation screws can protrude upwards and touch the strings, or even poke into your right hand.

Two posts extend from the underside of the bridge base. Inside each post, there's a grub screw that adjusts to set the string height. The pointed ends of the screws sit in a recess at the bottom of each thimble, which allows the whole bridge assembly to rock back and forth with minimal friction.

The saddle height screws are really for fine-tuning the string radius, and the grub screws actually set the overall string height at the bass and treble ends. The Bigsby bridge saddles ended up being slightly higher than the saddles of the stock bridge, so to get everything lined up properly I had to shim the neck with a piece of maple veneer. With everything lined up and the Tele playing nicely, I fine-tuned the string radius and intonation, finished off the wiring and Gary's Tele was good to go.

Verdict

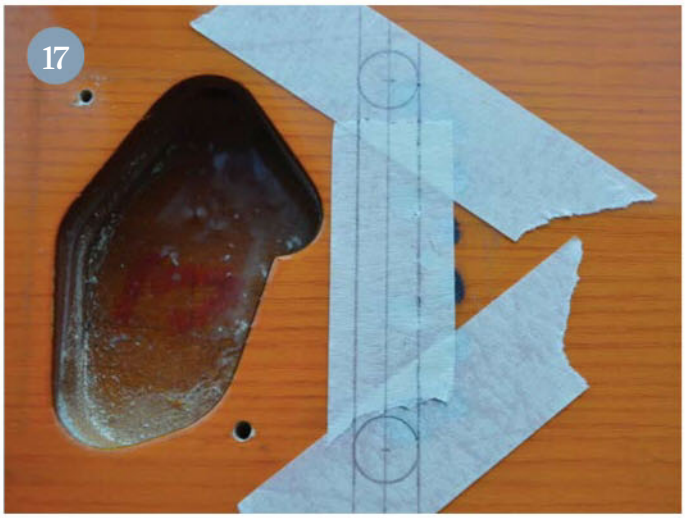
Guitars don't get much cooler than a Tele with a Bigsby. Having said that, all you'll get from one of these B5s is a touch of Bigsby slur and some pitch wobble on chords. Even by Bigsby standards, it's a subtle effect. I did notice that the acoustic tone was more solid and the guitar sustained longer, but Tele snap and twang was less evident – presumably because the string vibrations pass straight into the body rather than the bridge plate. >

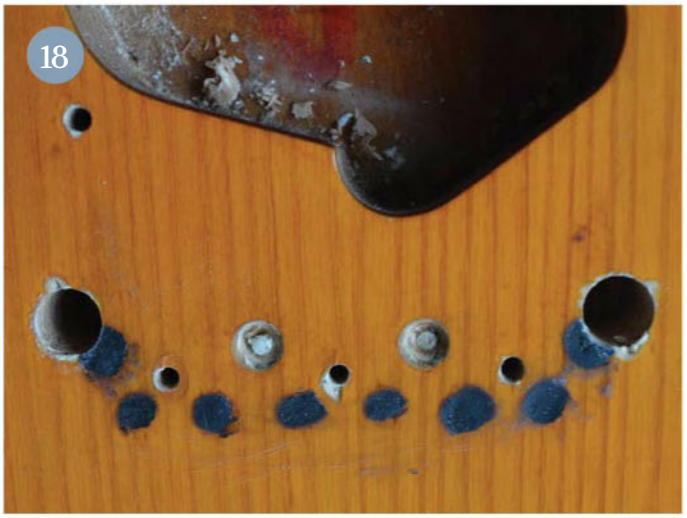
13 **Here's the new bridge with the centre screw over the centre line**

14 **Take your time when marking the position of the PAF cut-out. Measure thrice and cut once**

15 **A straight piece of timber acts as a guide when scraping the plastic with a Stanley knife blade. This is an easy way to achieve cut lines that are straight and square**

16 **Fixing the bridge plate loosely allows it to swivel, as it's lined up with the pickguard**





17 The thimble hole locations are marked and the centre points carefully established before drilling

18 For the thimble holes, I used a 9mm bradawl bit. Here, you can see how close the new holes come to the original screw holes

19 A bent length of unwound 'G' string wedges into the thimble hole and sits under the bridge plate to form an electrical connection from strings to ground

20 The Bigsby kit comes with red string to help you align the vibrato unit

HOW DOES GARY LIKE HIS REFURBED TELECASTER?

"Having fallen out of love with my old Tele, due to the fact that neither pickup alone offered desirable tones, it's now an almost unrecognisable guitar. In all five pickup positions, the sound is glorious. Huw told me to expect big things from the humbucker, describing it as the best PAF replica he'd heard, and it certainly lives up to that billing. Played through my Fender Hot Rod Deluxe with a splash of reverb, it's the classic full-bodied, vocal Tele clean sound I've always wanted, while there's sustain aplenty when driven; the Full Monty has bountiful bite and definition, too. The Bigsby doesn't seem to be affecting the tuning stability, and a vigorous band practice eased my fears about the bridge – although I'm not ruling out taking up Huw's offer of a Mastery upgrade just yet..."

It all works and it stays in tune, but I don't think much of the traditional Jazzmaster/Jaguar bridge. The multi-grooved saddles are a bit of a drag, and great care must be taken to adjust saddle height without having the strings contact the bridge behind the saddles. If this were my guitar, I'd be upgrading to a Mastery bridge as soon as funds allowed. Even so, it looks and plays better than it did before, and the pair of Monty's pickups have improved the sound immeasurably.

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

- **Esquire pickguard – www.allparts.uk.com**
- **Pickups – www.montysguitars.com**
- **Bigsby B5 Kit – www.fender.com**

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PATRICK JAMES EGGLE MACON CARVED TOP £3,595
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Patrick James Eggle Macon Carved Top

After focusing on acoustics in recent years, one of the UK's best luthiers is back in the electric game. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** plugs in

Patrick Eggle will be a familiar name to most readers, whether because of the Berlin electrics of the early 90s or his more recent acoustic designs under the Patrick James Eggle and Faith banners. Patrick's last serious foray into electric guitars was in the early noughties with the Discus, made in collaboration with Zemaitis engraver Danny O'Brien. It's in the chambered, double-cutaway Discus that you'll perhaps find the seeds of the instruments that mark his return to electric guitar manufacture proper over a decade later.

"I don't think I ever didn't want to build electric guitars again," Patrick explains. "It's just that the time wasn't right. We built a few about four years ago, just a very limited run, but I wasn't really able to devote the time to building more. We are now building both acoustic and electric guitars though. It's a different mindset and a lot of fun."

Crafted with meticulous care by Eggle, Sam Gill and Frank De Haan in the company's Oswestry workshops, the new Patrick James Eggle Macon electrics (just like Little Richard's birthplace in Georgia, it's pronounced like bacon, only with an 'm') are available exclusively from World Guitars in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire. The series began with chambered, flat-top models with a slightly enlarged (by approximately 6mm) double-cut Junior outline, and it now encompasses contoured and carved-top versions, still with chambered construction and the vintage Gibson-inspired body shape. The classic double-cutaway Junior format is something that's always appealed to Eggle: "I like the stripped-down functionality. Plus they're really great looking guitars. We have a flat-top version of the Macon. It's very, erm, utilitarian and non-blingy. That plain Jane aspect is very cool to me as a player. That said though, as a guitar maker, I cannot resist a pretty piece of timber. So we will definitely be putting together some real lookers..."

There's some formidable luthiery on display here, too, in the elegant lines of the deep carve of the redwood top

Lifting our model out of its black and white tweed hardcase, we're struck by how light and alive it feels; the low-gloss, hand-burnished nitrocellulose finish and aged hardware mean that, despite the depth of the figuring on the redwood top, this is an instrument that's a little more rock 'n' roll than many a boutique machine with an exotic cap. Rock 'n' roll doesn't mean thrown together, of course; there's some formidable luthiery on display here, too, in the elegant lines of the deep carve of the redwood top that flows into the scraped edge binding, and the snug ribcage contour in the subtly 'burst-finished mahogany back.

Initially, the nitrocellulose finish is applied in exactly the same way as it would be if it was to be buffed to a high gloss. "We can make that choice right at the end," says Eggle. "The hand-burnished finish is rubbed back using >

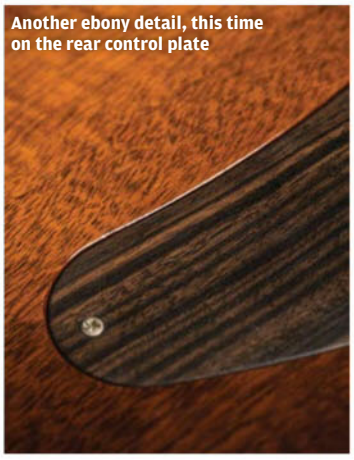
The Bare Knuckle Mule humbuckers have attractive Macassar ebony surrounds

KEY FEATURES

Patrick James Eggle Macon Carved Top

- **PRICE** £3,595
- **DESCRIPTION** Set neck, double-cutaway electric with chambered body. Made in UK
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany body with carved redwood top, Mahogany 'Fat C' neck with 304mm (12") radius Macassar ebony fingerboard with dot inlays and 22 Sintoms 6105 frets. Macassar ebony headstock fascia and truss rod cover
- **HARDWARE** Aged Waverly tuners, aged ABM tune-o-matic bridge and trapeze tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Bare Knuckle Mule humbuckers with aged covers, three-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone (pull coil-split)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.7kg/6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (no extra charge)
- **FINISHES** Hand-burnished, double-stained tobacco nitrocellulose (as reviewed). Numerous other finish and material options - call to discuss
- **CONTACT** World Guitars 01453 824306
  www.worldguitars.co.uk
  www.eggle.co.uk

The Macassar ebony fretboard has dramatic striping


Another ebony detail, this time on the rear control plate

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
When it comes to luxury double-cuts, **PRS** is impossible to ignore. We reviewed **Paul's Guitar £3,125** last month and found it supremely versatile. The **Rock 'N' Roll Relics Thunders II £1,899** dispenses with frills and sails much closer to the Gibson source as a result.

a fine abrasive paper, followed by extra-fine wire wool and wax to achieve this soft sheen. It's no better or worse than the gloss finish, just a different look that lots of our customers prefer."

Though every Macon is different and custom orders can be placed, the most obvious departure exhibited by our review guitar is its tailpiece. All of the other Macons we've seen have had German-made ABM wrapover bridges, but here there's a tune-o-matic and trapeze of the same origin that are milled from solid bell brass and nickel plated. The relatively short 41mm (bass side) and 45mm (treble side) distance between saddle and tailpiece means there's plenty of tension over the bridge and as a result, in combination with the 24.75-inch scale length, the feel and response is close to a typical ABR-1 and stopbar arrangement, with only extreme bends in combination with open strings betraying the fact that the tail floats. Aesthetically, it's an unusual touch on a boutique double-cut and, along with the open-gear Waverly tuners at the peghead end, there's an old-time vibe that complements the rich beauty of the deep-stained redwood and dramatic striping in the ebony 'board and headstock veneer.

Eggle's 'fat C' carve is spectacularly good. Over the years, this writer has consistently found chunky necks easier to play than slim profiles, but spend some time with a neck such as this and make up your own mind; we're willing to bet most players would be converted. Twin rear strap buttons ensure the guitar is less likely to topple if you lean it against an amplifier, but more importantly provide greater scope for adjustment than a single button, helping offset any neck dive that might otherwise occur with a lightweight, chambered instrument such as this.

In use

If you feel a little disillusioned with twin humbucker-loaded electrics, the Macon is a breath of fresh air, and not just because of the chambered construction. The Bare Knuckle Mules are excellent PAF-alikes, but as ever that's only part of the picture; the Macon has a real voice and a three-dimensional quality before you even plug it in. When you do, there's a top-drawer sonic quality and an expressive sophistication that puts our own ES-335 in the shade, and is one of the best-sounding humbucker-loaded guitars we've encountered, vintage or modern.

The three humbucking voices alone would be enough for many players – in this guise, the Macon can do anything an ES-335 can do and then some. But when you pull up the tone control to engage the split-coil mode the midrange is hollowed out, the output lowers slightly and there's a whole world of jangle and springy, Fender-like tonalities to play with for those lighter indie and 60s pop moments: whether that's Harrison or Marr, it's equally effective.

If you can afford it, then make no mistake, this is a British-made electric with a real soul and an all-round level of craft and quality that's up there with the best that the US boutique market has to offer. If you can't afford it, you'll wish you never played it...

OLD WOOD

"I love redwood," admits Eggle during our conversation. "It's very light and has a really open acoustic ring to it. The redwood I buy is old, salvaged from the stump wood of those really large old trees that were felled by hand with saws in the latter part of the 19th century. Foundation wood is super dense, due to it being at the base of the tree and supporting that incredible weight for so many years."

What about that wonderful neck shape? "I like a fatter neck," he says. "I think they're very comfortable, but more importantly stiffer with more mass. This helps the guitar to hold a note, even when the body is very light. We also put a carbon fibre strip either side of the truss rod. Some of our customers ask for a thinner neck. This is fine, but I want it to be stiff and pretty much inert. This mainly has come from my experience with acoustic guitars, where this is crucial, as I want the energy from the string to dissipate through the bridge, not the neck. At the moment, customers can choose from three body formats: flat top, drop top and carved top. Then the body can be chambered or not. We can cut f-holes, etc. Customers can select the tonewood, choose scale length, neck size and profile, inlays, frets... we are in the process of designing a larger-bodied, proper semi. This should be ready by the end of the year."

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

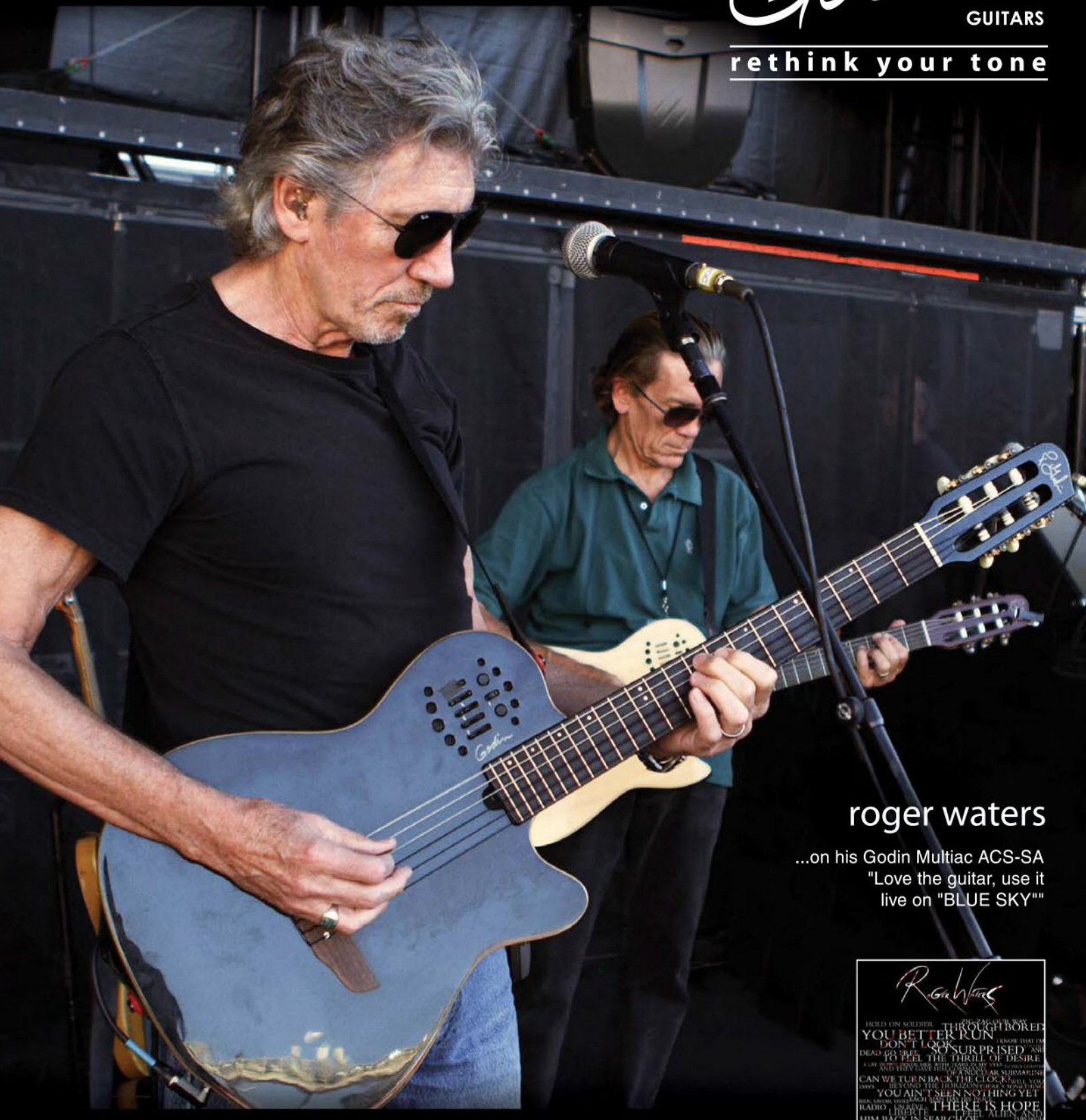
+ Fantastic neck shape
+ Beautifully built and finished
+ Premier league sounds
– This level of quality doesn't come cheap

One of Britain's finest builders returns to the electric guitar arena in considerable style. A glorious musical instrument.

9/10

Godin
GUITARS

rethink your tone



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GODIN SESSION LTD £649
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Godin Session LTD

A limited edition of a workhorse, with new finishes, upgraded pickups and a clever vibrato system. **SIMON BRADLEY** investigates

Canadian company Godin has always produced a wide and versatile choice of instruments, and whether your head is turned by models bursting with all manner of modern technology, such as the Multiac or LGX ranges, or you prefer guitars that are more down to earth, we'd suggest that any player would find something interesting in the catalogue.

The regular Session models, with high-quality tonewoods, a diverse choice of finishes and an excellent overall performance, are more than worthy of attention, and it's difficult to see how they could be improved on. There's no such lack of ambition from Godin, however, and three new Session LTD models were introduced at NAMM this year – upgraded versions that have been produced in limited numbers.

There's always something undeniably woody about Godin guitars, and the Session LTD is no exception. You can almost smell the aroma of the woodshop exuding from the hand-finished Rock maple neck, and the flawless satin feel makes it exceedingly playable. The shaping of the fingerboard edge results in a shallow D profile, and the neck as a whole puts on a little more meat as the 12th fret approaches. Even casual acquaintances with the company should be aware of the quality of Godin necks, and this is yet another beauty. It's secured to the body with a four-screw plate that's shaped to mirror the heel's ergonomic contouring. It's worth noting that models finished in Desert Blue and Desert Red are supplied with not only a maple fingerboard but also a pearloid scratchplate, should the livery of this example not appeal.

Many manufacturers have taken the plunge and now produce their own pickups; the likes of ESP/LTD, Jackson and Ibanez load a selection of their low- and mid-priced instruments with home-branded coils as a matter of course. Godin, too, takes this approach, and the regular Session features an HSS configuration of Godin pickups that includes the same pair of GS-1 single coils as loaded here. Replacing the covered Godin humbucker in the bridge is a double-white Seymour Duncan SH-11 Custom Custom, an Alnico II-based pickup that's best described as a PAF on steroids with an accentuated high range. Controls comprise volume and tone pots, with the latter doubling as a push/pull coil split for the humbucker.

The bridge pivots on two points and is made up of six hefty Fender-style and fully adjustable saddles. It's set to allow a modicum of upward movement – almost a full tone on the open G string – and is beautifully smooth in its operation. It also includes Godin's Tru-Loc system, a method of securing the screw-in vibrato arm in just the right place. Set the arm to your preferred position, use a 3mm allen key to lock >

There's always something undeniably woody about Godin guitars, and the Session LTD is no exception

The bridge incorporates Godin's Tru-Loc system

KEY FEATURES

Godin Session LTD

- **PRICE** £649, with padded Godin gigbag and straplocks
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar. Manufactured in Canada, assembled in USA
- **BUILD** Canadian Laurentian basswood body and engraved three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate; Rock maple neck with 12-inch radius and gloss headstock; rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Two-point Godin vibrato with Tru-Loc system
- **ELECTRICS** One Seymour Duncan SH-11 Custom Custom humbucker and two Godin GS-1 single coils, volume and tone controls, with push/pull humbucker coil split on tone pot; five-way Blade selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 52.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.63kgs/8lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Two regular Session models available (£549 or £599, depending on finish)
- **FINISH** Silver Gold, Desert Blue, Desert Red
- **CONTACT** 440 Distribution 0113 258 9599 **www.godinguitars.com**

The jack socket dish is secured with screws, keeping things tight

The truss rod can be adjusted at the headstock end

The neck join offers easy access for high-register playing

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender's Deluxe Lone Star Strat (£659) features a Twin Head HB alongside a pair of Texas Special single coils and the always-cool 70s-style headstock. **The Fret-King Corona SP (£539)** comes loaded with a stacked humbucker and two FK single coils, not to mention the usual gamut of Trev Wilkinson innovations while, for genuine value, the **HSS Yamaha Pacifica PAC212VFM** can be found at frankly staggering prices, considering how truly versatile it is

it in position via an aperture in the 13.5mm trem block and you're done. It's not immovable when secured, but does stay put where you leave it.

The body, a slightly squarer take on the classic Strat shape, is constructed from Canadian Laurentian basswood. Traditionally, at least, basswood is lightweight and airy, yet the Session is reassuringly weighty; the guitar as a whole weighs in at 8lbs.

To our eyes, the sparkly Silver Gold finish of this example is similar to Fender's Shoreline Gold option and, aside from a disappointingly blobby area surrounding the control cavity, has been applied satisfactorily. It's topped with a three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate that has been engraved with the Godin logo, and there's little doubt that the guitar is quite a looker.

In use

With a clean tone, the humbucker coil split – which solos the screw headed coil – provides an unusually nasal tone that's great for more aggressive country styles, and adding in the central pickup via position two adds body without compromising the trebly cut. It has that lovely 'in between' character that complements the high end to give versatile and balanced tone.

Positions three, four and five add incrementally more levels of depth, as expected, and we found the neck pickup's woody character was aided by removing some of the edge with the tone pot. That said, the twang that's inherent across all pickup selections is certainly engaging, and ensures your tone is never indistinct.

With more gain, the tone fills out and tightens up, with the full humbucker providing a striving rock rhythm tone that can really sear for solo work, especially if you kick in a drive pedal. The single coils sound great, too, with the split 'bucker coming across all spiky and full of attitude like a beefed-up Tele; while position two, probably our overall favourite, would be a great go-to tone for up-tempo blues styles.

There are arguably more suitable guitars on which to play hard rock and metal, but it's to the Session's credit that it's more than capable of flicking the horns. The humbucker's treble, coupled with the edge of a high-gain amp, gives a perfectly acceptable tone for these styles and, unlike some ceramic-based pickups, cleans up nicely on the volume pot without losing too much character. At super-dirty levels of high gain, it positively screams, and if your covers band is called upon to trot out *Du Hast* to satisfy the bride's mother, you'll be more than happy with the sheer aggression of the harmonics that jump out. The treble might be too much for some, but we loved it.

The term 'workhorse' can be perceived as disparaging, but if a single guitar can ably cover a number of musical bases, what's not to like? No guitar can authentically manage all tonal styles, but the Session LTD comes pretty close. It doesn't do jazz, nor is it ideal for music that needs a warm, soupy guitar. However, from blues and country, through pop and punk, and on to classic rock and beyond, it's impressive. It's a pro instrument that looks great, plays wonderfully and is fairly priced. There are plenty of options, too, so don't dismiss it down simply to the name on the headstock; you need to give it a whirl.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Eminently playable neck
+ Quality construction
+ Versatile performance
+ Good choice of options

– Tones won't be for everybody
– Limited production run
– Some issues with the finish

Affordable and versatile, the Godin Session LTD is a great-looking gigging workhorse that stands out from the crowd

8/10

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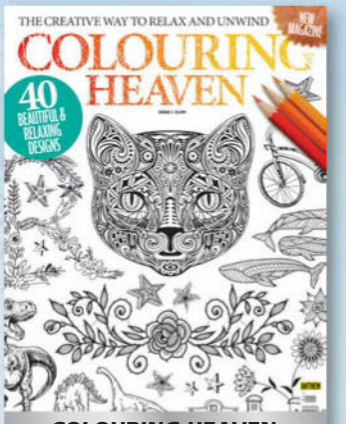

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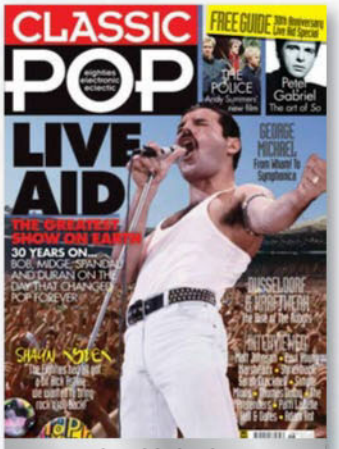

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VIGIER GV ROCK £2,169
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Vigier GV Rock

The best-known electric luthier outside of the US unveils a new single-cutaway design. **RICHARD PURVIS** assesses its true worth...

France may not appear a very rock 'n' roll country. Alhough they have their pop stars, and their sophisticated chanteurs, the whole grubby 'being in a band' culture is just not as deeply ingrained as it is on this side of the Channel. But the good news for those French people who do want to rock is that they have lots and lots of trees – almost 10 times more than the UK by total forested area – and Patrice Vigier walking among them with a big chainsaw.

Well, he might not actually be chopping them down himself, but Vigier is perhaps the best-known electric luthier outside of the USA, and his company sources all its timber from French forests. You don't get much more 'made in France' than that. This is a high-end brand with a deserved reputation for thoroughness and attention to detail, typified by the fact that all that wood is left to dry out for at least three years before use.

Vigier has long specialised in metal-ready shredders, but the single-cutaway GV models have been adding a Les Paul-ish element to the range since 2009. This year's version of the GV Rock brings cosmetic changes and one more significant addition: a Lester-like maple top on the alder body. This Revolution Red finish is one of four new colours, all with faux binding on the body – that is, a strip of paint carefully scraped away from the front edges to reveal the maple beneath. There's also a new embossed metal logo on the headstock.

The front of the top bout has a subtle yet distinctive chamfer, which brings a kind of symmetry with the one below, if nothing else; the curved edges around the back of the body are more welcome, especially on the heel of the bolt-on neck, where filing off the corner has brought obvious benefits for access to the upper frets.

The overall look of this guitar does not immediately chime with the four-digit number at the top of this page

We're not sure what to make of the overall look of this guitar, though – the combination of a powdery matt finish, uncovered humbuckers and an unbound, unmarked neck does not immediately chime with the four-digit number at the top of this page.

A close inspection, however, does reveal a level of immaculate construction and finish that you're unlikely to find on a more modestly priced instrument. That scraped binding effect has been pulled off flawlessly, and little touches such as the neatly recessed output jack add to the aura of craftsmanship.

Hardware-wise, there's a clear preference for sleekness over bling: the chromed bridge is essentially a tune-o-matic redesigned, with smoothly curved saddles to minimise the risk of string breakages; it forms a clean and tidy ensemble with the flat-topped tailpiece. The only other occupants of that maple top are master volume and tone >

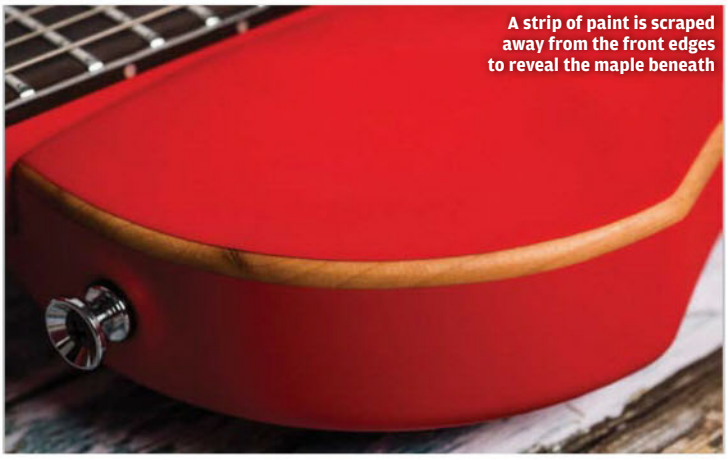
The chromed bridge is essentially a tune-o-matic with smoothly-curved saddles

KEY FEATURES

Vigier GV Rock

- **PRICE** £2,169 (including hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway solidbody electric, made in France
- **BUILD** Alder body with maple top; maple bolt-on neck with 22-fret rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Vigier fixed bridge and tailpiece, Schaller locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Amber 'Rock' humbuckers with five-way switch and master volume/tone controls
- **SCALE LENGTH** 630mm/24.8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19.5mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.8kg/8.4lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Red, Green, Yellow, Black (all matt); Amber, Black, Burgundy, Gold, Pearl White
- **CONTACT** High Tech Distribution 01722 410002 **htd-uk.com**

The headstock features a new embossed metal logo


A strip of paint is scraped away from the front edges to reveal the maple beneath

The Revolution Red finish is one of four new colours

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The obvious place to look for rocking humbucker tones with a little more treble than the average Gibson is **PRS**, whose striking **S2 Vela £1,289** impressed us with its coil-splittable bridge 'bucker. The **Knaggs Kenai £2,499** is a swanky single cut handcrafted in the USA by a former PRS designer. For another luxury European option, try Matt Bellamy's signature guitar, the UK-made **Manson MB-1S £3,374**.

controls, plus a five-way pickup switch. Hmm, five settings for only two pups? Brace yourself for some coil-tapping...

First, we'll check out the neck, which is (painted) maple with a rosewood board, and has been rendered eternally warp-proof – in theory at least – by Vigier's 10/90 system: put simply, a solid carbon-fibre core instead of an adjustable truss rod. The scale length is 630mm, just a smidge longer than a Gibson's, and the fretboard has a decidedly modern radius of just under 304mm (12"). There's a zero fret, which is actually formed of six individual 'saddles' so they can be replaced one by one in case of wear. You might well say this is bonkers; we couldn't possibly comment. Behind that is a teflon nut, while the headstock has a PRS-like asymmetrical shape, and holds three locking tuners on each side.

If you like the chunkiness of Les Pauls but crave something with a more aggressive top end, then here it is

In use

The German-made Amber humbuckers have been custom-voiced for this guitar, and the bridge pickup wastes little time in transforming the GV Rock's richly resonant and cultured acoustic tone into a festival of snarl. It's got lots of punch, and – the bit you really can't miss – much more brightness than a conventionally voiced 'bucker or P-90. The tone control does little to tame the spikiness until it's close to fully off, which is disappointing, but it's not going to be an issue for most rock players: if you like the chunkiness of Les Pauls, but crave something with a more aggressive top end, here it is.

The neck pickup is fatter and smoother, as you'd expect, but not by all that much – thanks to the maple top and the fieriness of the pickup, there's still plenty of bite in the attack. Pile on the gain with the right amp and your widdliest lead runs will remain clear and clicky on all six strings. Take the gain off again and you might be surprised by the smooth jazz tones. Either way, your fingers will thank you for choosing such an easy neck to show off on: it's just enough of a handful to feel like a grown-up guitar, and the medium-sized frets are impeccable.

One thing the GV Rock can't give you is the sound of two humbuckers at once, because all three of the middle settings put it into single-coil mode. We're now dealing with something closer to a Telecaster than a Les Paul: the overall output level is markedly lower, while the transparency and sparkle are higher. In fact, in the middle position it's brighter than my US Standard Tele, if not as clucky in character, with just a wee bit less bottom end.

The neck pickup in single-coil mode comes across as being extremely refined, displaying a soft spot for funk, while the bridge unit works well with a Tube Screamer for mid-gain crunchy riffing. Add metallic levels of distortion and it will pay you back with just about as much trebly sting as the human ear can take – which might be just what you need to cut through a sludgy mix. You're unlikely to fall properly in love with any of these coil-tapped tones, though. Where they'll probably find most use is as sweet rhythm sounds to sing over, before the humbuckers leap out of their box for the big solos.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

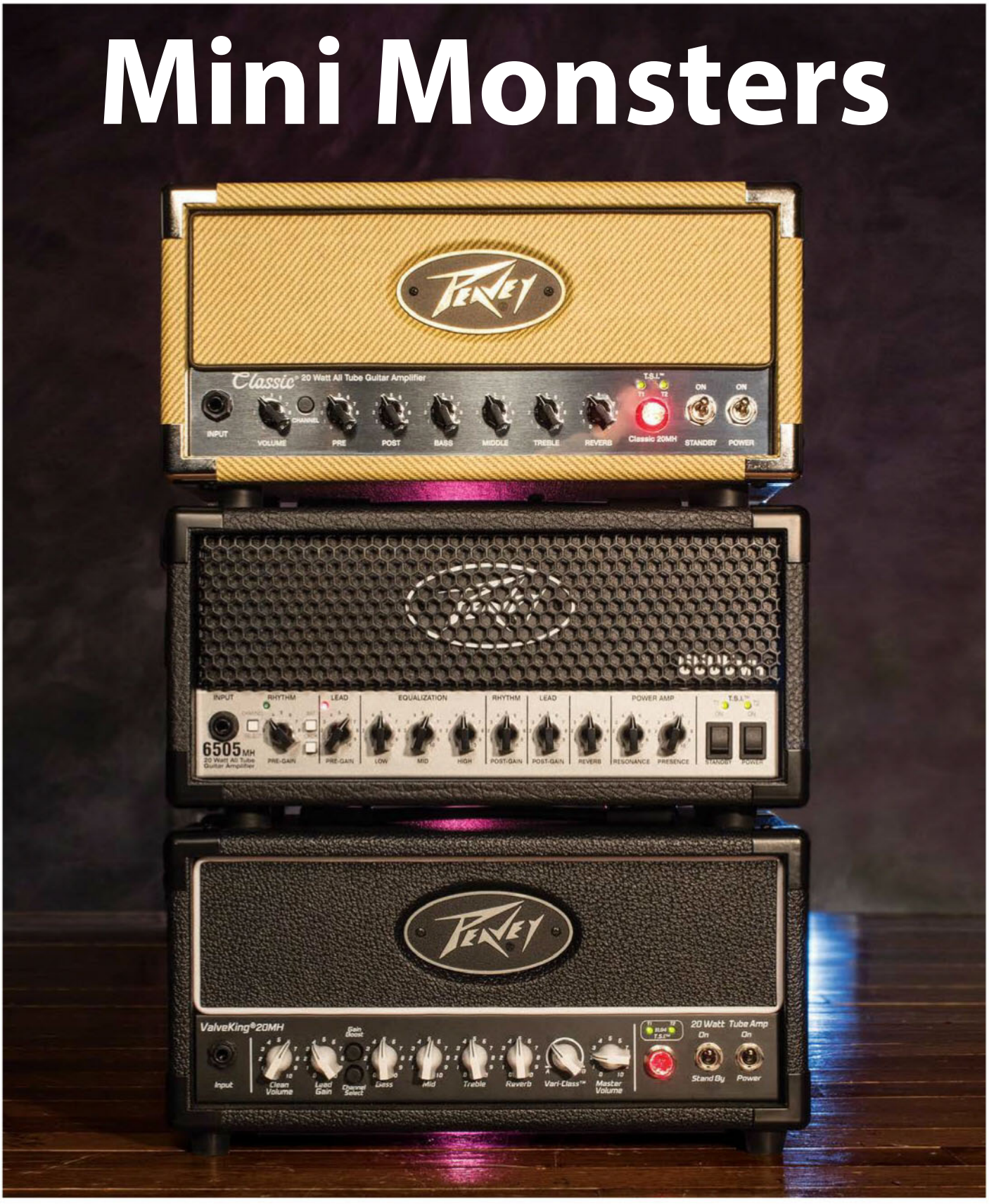
+ Stunning build quality and understated class
+ Supremely playable neck
+ Useful coil-tapped sounds

– Pickups will be too bright for some
– No 'both humbuckers' setting

A powerful and versatile rock guitar with the emphasis on no-expense-spared quality... and zingy treble

8/10

Mini Monsters



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B&G LITTLE SISTER £2,950
ELECTRIC GUITAR

B&G Little Sister

With its ES-140-like body and a slot-head parlor neck, is the B&G Little Sister a retro curio or a viable player? **HUW PRICE** finds out...

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Back in 2011, David Weitzman was listening to Robert Johnson and gazing at the famous photo of him holding a Gibson L-1. The 'fat and throaty tones' of early Delta blues guitarists became an obsession and Weitzman was on a one-man mission to crack the code.

He began collecting antique guitars, and in the process started learning about repair work. Weitzman ended up studying at The Algranati School of Lutherie in Israel, eventually designing and building the first Little Sister.

Weitzman took it to his friends at B&G Guitars for some finishing touches, and soon after B&G called to say it wanted to put the Little Sister into production – albeit with a handful of enhancements.

The Little Sister is now available with or without a cutaway, and customers can request PAF-style humbuckers or P-90s. B&G casts its own tailpieces and, like the pickup covers, they're fabricated from a unique brass alloy.

Much of the tone timber is reclaimed wood, and fingerboards can be Brazilian, Madagascan or Amazonian rosewood. The options for the neck and chambered bodies are Honduras and African mahogany, and customers can choose from a selection of Eastern maple tops before the guitars are built.

B&G even makes its own glue, and the in-house ethos extends to the pickups. The review guitar was fitted with P-90s with un-potted scatter-wound coils of 42 AWG wire. Long, roughcast Alnico V and II magnets are used in the neck and bridge pickups respectively.

This example is made from African mahogany and a kingwood fingerboard, inlayed with pearl dots. The Stewart-MacDonald Golden Age Restoration tuners work smoothly, and Little Sister customers can choose whether to have the brass parts clear-coated to prevent tarnishing or simply to allow nature to do its own thing.

It's not simply a visual thing. The Little Sister really does feel like an old guitar, albeit a factory-fresh one

Brass is also used for the control cavity cover and a brass pickguard is provided along with screws – to be fitted at the owner's discretion. A soft 'V' is the standard neck profile, but customers can specify profiles and fingerboard width. The finish is nitrocellulose and a variety of sunbursts and custom colours are available.

The Little Sister can be ordered directly from B&G or through its UK dealer, The North American Guitar. The distributor books slots in advance, so ordering through them is quicker – or if you prefer, you can buy from B&G's shop stock without waiting.

In use

It's not simply a visual thing. The Little Sister really does feel like an old guitar, albeit a factory-fresh one. Although the neck was described as having a 'V' shape, it actually feels quite rounded >

B&G casts its own tailpieces, which are fabricated from a unique brass alloy

KEY FEATURES

B&G Little Sister

- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar, manufactured in Israel
- **PRICE** £2,950
- **BUILD** Chambered African mahogany body, flame maple top, one-piece African mahogany set neck with soft 'V' profile, 12" radius kingwood fingerboard with pearl dot inlays and 20 narrow frets
- **HARDWARE** Solid brass tailpiece, gold-plated tune-o-matic bridge, Stewart MacDonald Golden Age Restoration tuners
- **ELECTRICS** B&G manufactured unpotted P-90-style single-coil pickups, master volume & tone, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 624mm/24.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.15kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (no extra cost)
- **FINISHES** Most classic sunburst varieties, plus custom colours
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 **www.bngguitars.com**

Stewart-MacDonald Golden Age Restoration tuners

Brass alloy fittings reinforce the retro vibe

A 36mm string spacing at the nut

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The boutique market is full of semi-solids, but most evoke an idealised vision of the late 50s and early 60s. Do check out the **Kauer Daylighter £2,499** and the **Fano RB6 Thinline £2,999**. The **Gibson ES Les Paul £2,149** is a semi-solid with a figured maple top.

and the depth certainly fills the palm. Skinny frets add to the impression.

The body style and 14th-fret neck join may trick you into thinking the scale is even shorter than 622mm (24.5"). Small-bodied acoustics first inspired the design, and that has carried over into the general feel. However, in terms of playability, the Little Sister has the fast suppleness of a well-played vintage electric guitar.

Acoustically, it's louder than a Les Paul and sounds more like a highly resonant ES-335. The tone is also full and well balanced, which means it's fun to play unplugged and there's plenty for the pickups to work with.

Just because a pickup looks like a P-90, there's no guarantee that it will sound like one. We have learned from previous reviews that winding pickups in-house isn't always advisable, but in this case it has paid off in spades. Both of these P-90s are noticeably microphonic and produce the type of tone that would make any vintage guitar enthusiast feel right at home.

The more aggressive attributes of P-90s have perhaps been overplayed in recent times. Strap one to a mahogany plank and, for sure, you will certainly get quintessential rock 'n' roll tone. But good P-90 pickups can also deliver some of the sweetest, most delicate and clean sounds in the electric guitar pantheon.

The Little Sister's P-90s are a case in point, and there are three distinct but balanced sounds. The bridge position's midrange has a snarly quality that is coupled with an authentic vintage quack. The low strings, meanwhile, are focused and even twangy when you play near the bridge, while the treble has a chiming sheen, without sounding too bright.

The Little Sister is a reminder that plugging a great electric guitar directly into a valve amp can sound magical

In the neck position, the Little Sister is sweetly-rounded, smooth and vocal. It has just as much treble as the bridge pickup, but the clunky character gives way to a woody mellowness that's perfect for blues and even pulls off a passable impersonation of 50s jazz tone.

With both pickups together, the phasey mid-scoop is very noticeable, and this is the position that almost compelled me to grab a thumb pick or play with my fingers. These days, it's easy to get fixated on pedals, effects and overdrive. The Little Sister is a reminder that plugging a great electric guitar directly into a valve amp can sound magical.

But for all its gorgeous clean tone, it always feels that the Little Sister has a darker and meaner side. Unexpectedly, the Little Sister's 'acoustic' qualities are more apparent when the amp is cranked than in clean mode. However, unlike some semis, there's no need to struggle for sustain.

The bridge pickup produces a full-throated sprang. The lower mids growl and the upper mids bite in an undeniably bluesy sort of way. The neck setting sounds huge and fat, but still clear. Mild overdrive has a swampy and rootsy quality that morphs into a buttery smooth and roaring sustain as the gain is increased.

There's no treble bleed capacitor, but you can still clean up by rolling back the volume control without losing clarity. In fact, the touch dynamics and clean-up characteristics are much like the '54 Goldtop that's also featured in this issue. However, the pickups are prone to squealing, and while the Little Sister behaves quite well with a cranked amp, using overdrive pedals can be rather problematic.

If I wanted to be picky, I could point out some finish imperfections where the fingerboard shim meets the body. A smaller neck heel may ease upper-fret access, but B&G points out that mass in this area optimises tone, and I wouldn't argue with that. The metalwork looks bright and shiny, too, but if and when the brass and the nitro finish start to age, this guitar will doubtless look even more beautiful.

Ry Cooder once made some observations about the 'true purpose' of the electric guitar. He said, "In the 1950s, electric guitar was coming into itself, from a primitive idea into something very grand and beautiful. There has to be beauty there, and character and personality." He might as well have been talking about the Little Sister, and if I had the funds, I would buy one in an instant.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ It's drop-dead gorgeous
+ Wonderful tone
+ Effortlessly playable
+ Outstanding pickups
+ Controls that really work

– Overdrive/high gain makes the pickups squeal
– Heel slightly restricts upper-fret access
– Some barely noticeable finish imperfections

The Little Sister is both timeless and fresh. It also happens to sound incredible and plays beautifully

9/10

The new PRS SE Alex Lifeson is a roadworthy guitar for players looking for the ideal stage and studio instrument.

With a solid spruce top and figured dao back and sides, the guitar features the same hybrid bracing as Alex's PRS Private Stock model, giving it a warmth and resonance rarely found in shallow-body acoustics.

"This is a guitar of stunning quality. The carefully selected materials, expert craftsmanship and smart approach to the concept have resulted in a guitar that is both beautiful and rewarding to play." – Alex Lifeson

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Eventide H9 Max

The ultimate stompbox now has a Max version with loads of extra sounds... including distortion. Review by **RICHARD PURVIS**

KEY FEATURES

Eventide H9 Max

- **PRICE** £639
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-effects processor. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Rotary controller; X, Y, Z and Hotknob parameter buttons (all with secondary functions); preset selector button, bypass and tap footswitches; USB and 9-12V power inputs, stereo inputs and outputs, expression pedal input
- **ADDITIONAL FEATURES** H9 Control software (Windows, Mac, iPad) for patch editing and free access to all current and future algorithms
- **CONTACT** Source Distribution 020 8962 5080 **www.eventide.com**

Does this look familiar? Back in June 2014, we reviewed a little white box called the Eventide H9, which blew us across the room with its studio-quality delays, reverbs and pitch-shifting effects. What we're looking at here is, in fact, an identical enclosure; but the addition of the word 'Max' denotes a whole new level of sonic potential on the inside – including access to Eventide's new distortion algorithm, CrushStation. And, yes, it also alludes to a recommended retail price that can be described only as spectacular.

Bear in mind, though, that this is very far from being an ordinary stomper. Eventide has been making pro studio processors for 40 years, and the bloodline of the H9 series traces right back to the original H910 Harmonizer, one of the very first devices to offer digital pitch manipulation. A more obvious link is to the current TimeFactor, ModFactor, PitchFactor and Space units, Eventide's first forays into floor-dwelling effects.

The standard H9 (£479) takes eight of its nine algorithms from those pedals, the ninth being an UltraTap delay that isn't found anywhere else; the H9 Core is a cheaper option at £359, which comes with just pitch and delay effects. Both of these can be upgraded with additional algorithms at $19.99 each, thanks to the magic of the internet, but the simplest and most satisfying solution – assuming that you're not concerned by such minor trivialities as cost – is surely to cut straight to the Max version.

This doesn't, in fact, come loaded with anything new, but once you've downloaded the free H9 Control software and paired it up with the pedal via Bluetooth, USB or MIDI, it gives you unlimited access to every effect in the Eventide stompbox armoury – including those it hasn't even yet thought of. We counted 46 of them: 10 each from the TimeFactor, ModFactor and PitchFactor, 12 from the Space, and four H9 exclusives. We've already mentioned two of these, CrushStation and UltraTap; the others are Resonator, offering spookily filtered delays, and a self-explanatory twin effect called simply EQ Compressor.

The extra delays and reverbs are every bit as mindblowing as the ones that are available to standard H9 owners

Each algorithm comes with a whole bunch of presets to play around with – look out for Transcendental Dolphin, worth it for the name alone – and the pedal has room to store 99 of these. You can tweak your tones with H9 Control or, if you don't mind the fiddliness of navigating through menus on the little screen with double button presses, can access every parameter on the unit itself. This might be necessary if you're separated from your computer or iPad, but we'll be honest, it's no fun at all. Still, the tap footswitch can be used for toggling through presets, so have them all cued up beforehand and it is possible to get through a gig or recording session using only your dancing toes.

In use

Reviewers are not paid to be sensible, so we begin with the usual process of plugging straight in (manual, what manual?) and zipping through the factory presets to see just how zany this thing can get. The answer is very zany indeed, but we won't dwell too long here because these are the same sounds we heard from the original H9 last year. The two key points to reiterate are that the audio quality is consistently fantastic – there's a pristine clarity at the heart of everything this unit does – and that the scope for creativity is almost overwhelming.

There are tape-style delays, amp-style reverbs and 80s-style chorus sounds, but it's the more extreme effects that really mark this out as a special piece of kit. The pitch algorithms can be used to create layered harmonies and arpeggios, while the swelling reverbs and heavily modulated delays conjure up atmospheres that you might not have thought possible from a guitar. Well done for blowing us across the room again, Eventide... but now let's talk about the new bits.

This is where it all so nearly went badly wrong. Our review unit did not

come with a mini USB cable and the one we dug out from a drawer didn't seem to work, while establishing a Bluetooth connection with a MacBook proved impossible. Frustration peaked and the H9 Max was grumpily stuffed back into its box, ready to be thrown off the nearest tall building. But then everything changed: a working cable appeared, and meanwhile Eventide's UK distributors supplied us with the login details for this specific unit so we could unlock the Bluetooth (you'll need to set up your own account). The lights came on and all was forgiven.

Once you're in, H9 Control is a tidy piece of software with a simple interface that makes selecting and editing presets a doddle. The only slight annoyance is that, when you want to save a new sound to the pedal, the dropdown menu gives you only a list of numbers from 1 to 99, with no indication of which ones might already be occupied. It's quick, though, and the on-screen knobs are just as responsive as physical controls.

We'll focus on the CrushStation algorithm, because this is the effect that marks a bit of a departure for Eventide. Is it reckless for a specialist in digital manipulation to dabble in the hairy-backside stuff? Well, maybe not. Most of the presets are on the heavy side, and they score highly for fat, beefy impact; pull the gain down into Tube Screamer territory and things start to sound just a wee bit less natural, but that's to be expected – and anyway, you already have a pedal for that, right? There are some interesting variables beyond the obvious EQ and gain controls, most notably 'octave' for Octavia-style textures, 'sag' for simulating lo-fi voltage starvation, and 'sustain' for adding thickness either before or after the distortion. All of these work fiendishly well and help to ensure CrushStation is adding genuine value to the H9 offering – there are sounds available here that you definitely *don't* already have a pedal for.

The extra delays and reverbs are every bit as mindblowing as the ones that are available to standard H9 owners, and it pays to experiment with two amps in stereo. It's just a shame you can't create 'whole pedalboard' presets using several effects daisy-chained together. At its heart, perhaps, this is still more of a studio processor than a gigging tool; for many players it might even have made more sense in rackmount format, with a nice big screen and lots of knobs for hours of easy tweaking without a laptop or tablet in sight.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ 46 crazily inspiring effects in one box
+ Unbeatable audio quality
+ New high-gain sounds are convincing and versatile

- Frightening price for one effect at a time
- Fiddly to control as a standalone stompbox

The new distortion effects are a worthy addition, but you're paying a heavy premium here for the ultimate in sound quality so you'd better be sure you need it

8/10

Like this? Try these...

There's not a lot of competition in the compact one-at-a-time multi-effects market, with Eventide's most obvious competitor in the delay and reverb stakes, Strymon, keeping its effects such as the TimeLine and BigSky individual. But here are a few alternatives to check out...

Zoom MS-50G

£99

Zoom's latest MultiStomp unit crams 55 custom guitar effects and amp models, plus a chromatic tuner, into a stompbox-sized enclosure for a retail price as low as £69. In addition to all the usual effects types, you get emulations of amps from the likes of Fender, Marshall, Vox, Two Rock, Diezel and ENGL.

Line 6 M5

£169

Although its now been superseded by the larger, more advanced M9, the M5 is a great place to start in the world of multi-effects, offering a wealth of reverb, delay, modulation, distortion and overdrive effects at frankly ridiculous street prices as low as £72.

TC Electronic Nova **£246**

While the Nova is larger than the other selections here, it offers a vast range of effects in six blocks, and can be found online for a very attractive £140. It incorporates TC's innovative G-System and Nova Drive technology, with a fully analogue drive and overdrive section.

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JHS SuperBolt & Twin Twelve

Vintage Supro and Silvertone amps are pretty scarce in the UK. Can you get their sounds from these pedals? **HUW PRICE** finds out

Like many boutique stompbox companies, JHS started out with one guy in an apartment trying to repair a broken pedal. Josh Scott was so pleased with the outcome of that work that he was inspired to learn more. A period of pedal modding followed, until his technical understanding reached the level where he began designing his own pedals from scratch.

Although JHS has grown as a company, it's still a hands-on operation with four full-time builders and a few extra support staff servicing more than 100 dealers worldwide. As well as offering pedal modifications and rehousing services, JHS has built up a fairly extensive range of original products that include the specialised overdrive/boosters we are reviewing this month.

Both are built in regular-sized enclosures, finished in two shades of grey with screen printed logos and legending. Neither pedal accommodates a battery because voltages are bumped up internally to 18 volts from a regular centre negative nine-volt supply.

SuperBolt

These days, there's a vogue for overdrive pedals that are configured to sound like specific vintage amps. The SuperBolt is designed to simulate the tone and character of 1960s-era Supros, and features discreet components mounted neatly on a bespoke printed circuit board with open frame jacks and voltage trim pots for all the transistors.

It's worth noting that the SuperBolt is an exceptionally transparent and natural-sounding boost pedal

The tone control is "fairly true to the designs in many of these vintage amps", and is designed to produce usable tones throughout its range. A hi/low toggle switch provides two gain settings, which the manual likens to the high- and low-level inputs found on many amplifiers.

Sounds

Before getting into the overdrive tones, it's worth noting that the SuperBolt is an exceptionally transparent and natural-sounding boost pedal. For a neutral treble response, you need to roll the tone back to around 10 o'clock, and there is some slight bass roll-off that you can't do anything about. On the plus side, your guitar tone will be clearer. The low setting has a bit more midrange, while the hi setting is slightly brighter. The SuperBolt's natural brightness becomes less apparent as drive is added and volume is reduced. In low mode, the overdrive comes through as a throaty bark in the mids, with ever-increasing amounts of compression.

At extreme levels, there's a slightly ragged and aggressive Class AB quality to the breakup, juxtaposed with a surprisingly sweet, chiming treble. The SuperBolt remains touch sensitive throughout, and will clean up when you play lighter. >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SuperBolt

The **Sonic Fusion Supreaux Deux $159** is a licensed pre-built version of a DIY Supro-in-a-box project detailed on the Run Off Groove website. The **Pedal Monsters White Lightning Overdrive V2 £81** is also popular for Supro sounds.

Twin Twelve

Silvertone amp soundalike pedals are a bit niche, but you could check out the **Greer Ghetto Stomp $149.99** or the **Lumpy's Tone Shop Class A Overdrive $140**.

Equating hi mode to an amp's high sensitivity input seems about right, and you get more of everything. In low mode, I might leave the SuperBolt activated as a tone shaper, but in hi mode it behaves more like a regular overdrive – albeit with a highly stylised sound.

At extreme drive levels, the SuperBolt does a convincingly fuzzy impersonation of a vintage mid-power valve amp on the verge of meltdown, yet that sweet and articulate treble remains. As for sounding like a Supro, we'd have to ask which model, because JHS isn't exactly forthcoming on that one.

Twin Twelve

This time, the amp JHS has chosen to emulate is the Silvertone 1484 – as used by artists such as Beck, Death Cab For Cutie and Jack White. The Twin Twelve has discrete transistor stages that replace the 1484's valves, with each stage adjusted for optimum voltage, and it's built with surface mount components.

The controls include volume, drive, bass and treble. The equaliser is close to the 1484's Baxandall circuit, but tweaked to maximise the useful range. Both bass and treble controls are active and provide boost and cut.

Sounds

I should probably fess up and admit that I have never played through a 1484, or indeed any other Silvertone amp. They were cheap amps sold through catalogues in the US, so while they may be commonplace over there, relatively few crossed the Atlantic. My only recourse, therefore, was YouTube.

Online demos can't give you any indication of playing dynamics, but they can be useful when you want to learn something about tonal characteristics and range of sounds. Without exception, all the 1484s sound raunchy and ballsy. The mids and upper bass are thick and rounded, but there's plenty of upper-mid bite and pick definition, too. At higher gain levels, it veers towards fuzziness, and the overall vibe is discernibly vintage.

So, does the Twin Twelve nail the 1484 thing? Given that I can't do an AB test, my answer would be an enthusiastic, although qualified, yes. Regardless of the drive setting, simply switching on the Twin Twelve ramps up the fun factor.

With humbuckers, some might find the woolly bass lacking a little in definition to cut through a dense mix, but it has an authentic grind that almost compels you to play garage-punk rhythm and blues-rock riffs.

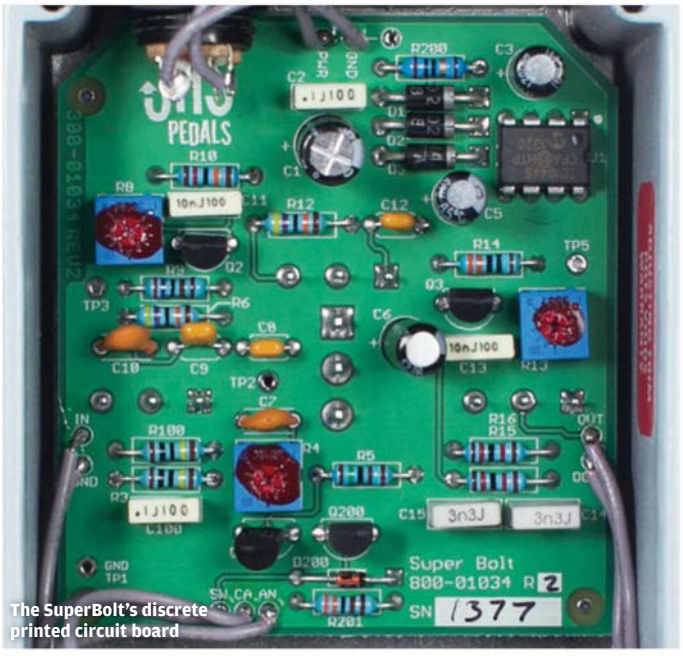
Like a valve amp, it cleans up nicely from a guitar, but this feature works best with lower-output single coils. At low-to-medium drive settings, it also obliges you to work a little harder if you want sustain for soloing, but again this feels authentically amp-like. It also retains a sweet jangle with clear note separation, even at relatively high drive settings.

Both equaliser controls are very powerful and usable over their entire ranges. You can go from lo-fi clanginess, with the bass cut and the treble maxed out, to a soupy sixties fuzztone, with bumped-up bass and drive combined with heavy treble cut.

Although Supro amps are being made once again, their sonic character may be something you'd want to enjoy now and again rather than use as the basis of your tone. The SuperBolt may be an effective and cost-effective alternative, but it also holds its own as a boost/overdrive pedal.

The Twin Twelve is at its most effective when adding character and colour to clean-sounding amps, because it responds so well to volume adjustments and playing dynamics. You can match levels with the bypassed sound without losing any vibrancy or power, and it stacks very nicely with other boosts and overdrives, too. It's the sort of pedal you may want to leave switched on all the time.

The Twin Twelve is at its most effective adding character and colour to clean-sounding amps. It responds so well to volume adjustments



The SuperBolt's discrete printed circuit board

KEY FEATURES

SuperBolt

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Supro-simulating boost/overdrive pedal running on 9V centre negative power supply. Made in the USA
- **CONTROLS** True bypass footswitch, volume, tone, drive and hi/low toggle switch
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars 01376 5530161 **www.jhspedals.com**

Guitar VERDICT

+ Transparent boost
+ Hi/low provides extra versatility
+ Very well built
+ Amp-like overdrive

– Limited range of tones

A Supro-inspired boost/overdrive that's manufactured with very high-quality components

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Twin Twelve

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Silvertone-simulating boost/overdrive pedal running on 9V centre negative power supply. Made in the USA
- **CONTROLS** True bypass footswitch, volume, bass, treble and drive
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars 01376 553016 **www.jhspedals.com**

Guitar VERDICT

+ Bags of character
+ Powerful equaliser
+ Wide range of tones

– Slightly woofy bass

A boost/overdrive stompbox that does a great job of capturing a good amount of the classic Silvertone 1484 tone

8/10

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ThorpyFX Muffroom Cloud Fuzz

Could Major Thorpe's second offering be all Muffs to all men? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** gets a visit from the fuzz in the *G&B* review of the ThorpyFX Muffroom Cloud...

KEY FEATURES

ThorpyFX Muffroom Cloud Fuzz

- **PRICE** £184
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue fuzz pedal with active EQ. Made in the UK
- **CONTROLS** Volume, sustain, treble, bass
- **FEATURES** True-bypass footswitch, 9V battery or mains power
- **DIMENSIONS** 70 (w) x 145 (d) x 60mm (h)
- **CONTACT** www.thorpyfx.com

Regular readers will remember ThorpyFX from the Gunshot overdrive pedal we were wowed by in the August issue of *G&B*. As we explained in our Gunshot review, ThorpyFX came into being when British Army Major Adrian Thorpe took up stompbox building to relieve the stress of his high-pressure day job as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist. And no, we're not doing the bomb-proof build-quality gag again.

Following the hugely positive response to the Gunshot, Thorpe turned his attention to a different kind of drive pedal, based on the early Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi fuzz pedals built between 1969-73. Nicknamed 'Triangle' Big Muffs due to the orientation of the pedal's three control knobs, there were approximately 17 variations on the circuit of the first production Big Muffs developed by Mike Matthews and Bob Myer. However, there was one particular vintage unit that Thorpe set out to beat...

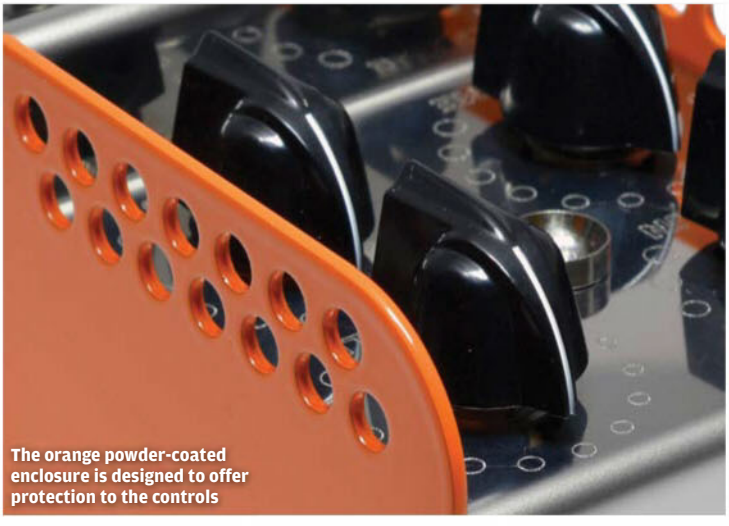
"Of all the Muffs, Triangle Big Muffs have always been my favourite circuit," he explains. "I just find it really sweet and really articulate, but like all Muffs you can have a problem hitting the sweet spot with the tone control. Some are great and have the mids that cut through, but trying to find a vintage version that does that is hard. A friend of mine had a particularly lovely PNP Triangle Big Muff, and he loaned it to me, and I was like, 'this is astonishing, what's going on here?'.

"Triangle Big Muffs have always been my favourite circuit, I just find it really sweet and articulate, but you can have a problem hitting the sweet spot"

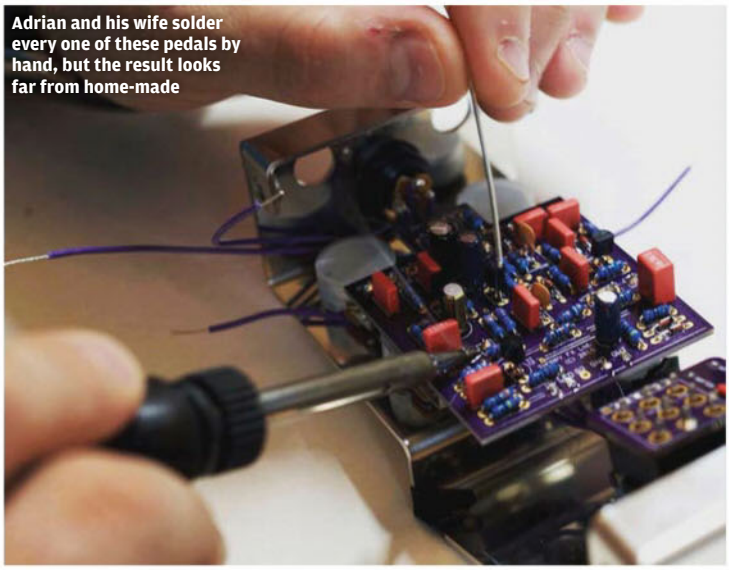
"So I opened it up and there's nothing particularly amazing; there were no component value changes that I could see, but I couldn't measure any drift of components. But it was a benchmark for me. What I wanted to do was achieve the same thing, but with newer components and consistency. I tried to do it, couldn't do it for a little while, then came up with the idea that the key thing was the EQ.

"The front end of the circuit is absolutely fine; it needs a few changes to lower the gain and suchlike, but actually it's all about the EQ. I messed with different styles and ended up with an active tone stack – treble and bass – that actually came out of a vintage 70s audio unit.

"A friend of mine – Dan Coggins, who was the designer of Lovetone pedals and now Dinosaural – collaborated with me on it, and he suggested that this circuit was great because there's so much scope for bass and treble; and when you adjust them, the two overlap and you can get a peak in the mids or lower the mids, so that's awesome. It sounds amazing in front of a JTM45 just



The orange powder-coated enclosure is designed to offer protection to the controls



Adrian and his wife solder every one of these pedals by hand, but the result looks far from home-made

on the edge, it's incredible. It sounds great in front of a clean amp, but it cuts through. There's plenty of sustain available, but it's vintage-voiced. I will do something that's a lot more raucous down the line... but now my friend who has the vintage one is selling it; he bought a Muffroom Cloud and said, 'you've nailed it'."

Arriving neatly wrapped in orange tissue paper inside its box, like the Gunshot, the Muffroom Cloud exudes class before you power up, thanks to a stainless steel enclosure with a laser-etched graphic depicting a stylised hydrogen bomb schematic and exceptionally robust external build quality. It's not as big as it might seem, though; at only a few millimetres wider than a standard compact Boss pedal, the top-mounted Neutrik in/out jack sockets and nine-volt PSU connector actually make it more space-efficient in terms of width when it's in situ on a pedalboard.

Inside, the Muffroom Cloud is just as smart and confidence-inspiring as its exterior, with a thick, gold-plated PCB housing metal film resistors with a one per cent tolerance and WIMA and Panasonic capacitors. Off-board, the volume, sustain, bass and treble controls are high-quality, dust-sealed potentiometers and the smooth-action, true-bypass footswitch is rated at many thousands of cycles. Time to step on it...

In use

Without the over-cooked distortion levels of some modern Big Muffs and Muff-derived circuits, it's immediately apparent that the Muffroom Cloud makes it possible to retain a great deal more control. The presence of separate, active treble and bass controls is a real asset, allowing you to dial in the cutting high frequencies you need to be heard in the mix, and then sculpt the body of the sound beneath; with a single tone control, most Muffs get thinner as you wind up the treble, but here you get to fine-tune the balance of girth and grit.

Like any Muff-style circuit without a gate, engaging the pedal lifts the noise floor, but it's well within acceptable tolerances, and when engaged there's enough definition and clarity for more complex chord voicings with the kind of subtleties that might usually get lost in a wall of fuzz.

Another benefit of the sensible level of gain on tap is that fuzzy alternative-rock riffs and powerchord rhythms remain focused. One of our favourite ways in which to use the pedal was to keep the sustain and treble at around 1-2 o'clock; even with the volume control dialled in to give the amp a serious kick, at band levels this provides crunchy raunch with a fuzzy rasp for rhythm parts and a sensible decay that's still highly controllable, even when playing choppy or syncopated rhythm parts.

The Muffroom Cloud stacks well, too; with a variety of overdrives and boosts placed after it in the chain, or into an already driven amp, we were able to produce some wonderfully fluid sustain for Gilmour and Santana-style lead. The lower reaches of the pedal's gain range are also worthy of investigation; there are some great raspy garage blues sounds to be found with the sustain around 10-11 o'clock, that bring Dan Auerbach's early Black Keys tones to mind.

While hardcore Big Muff aficionados often have several models they rely on for different tasks, we already know several who reckon the Muffroom Cloud is the answer to their prayers for live use. It certainly sounds great when you turn it up in a rehearsal room, and where others fizz or collapse into an over-compressed, saggy mush, this pedal snarls and sings; all the while, because there's no attempt to make it too gainy, it remains responsive to picking-hand dynamics in a way that makes some less sophisticated designs sound comically unsubtle.

If Muff-style fuzz is your once-in-a-set special effect, then there are cheaper pedals that will do the job, for sure. But if it's a big part of your sound, then we'd recommend that you check out the Muffroom Cloud before demand goes through the roof. ThorpyFX may be a small operation but, inside and out, the attention to detail exhibited by Adrian's pedals results in a vibe that's about as far from homemade as it gets.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great range of fuzztones, from Floyd to QOTSA
+ Powerful active tone stacks
+ Extremely impressive build quality and internals

- The price is fair but may deter more casual fuzz fans

Both articulate and explosive in equal measure, the ThorpyFX Muffroom Cloud is the bomb

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix makes many flavours of Muff these days, and the **Big Muff Pi With Tone Wicker** £68 has additional tone switching. The **Earthquaker Devices Hoof £139** sounds closer to the green Russian Muff made by Sovtek in the 1990s, but has a shift control that helps scoop or boost mids. Vick Audio's 73 **Ram's Head Muff $129** is many a Gilmour fan's preferred choice for smooth, violin-like sustain.

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar Stereo Tap Tremolo

This new pedal from Electro-Harmonix takes tremolo into uncharted sound-sculpting territory. **GARY WALKER** has his finger on the pulse...

KEY FEATURES

Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar Stereo Tap Tremolo

- **PRICE** £219
- **DESCRIPTION** Stereo tap tremolo pedal with analogue circuitry
- **CONTROLS** Volume, Rt. phase, wave, shape, depth, wave invert, tap divide, exp mode, envelope depth, envelope rate, xRate, tap tempo switch, mode preset, bypass
- **FEATURES** Stereo ins/outs, adjustable modulation waveforms, tap tempo, tap divide, expression pedal control, volume boost of up to 12db, eight preset slots, eight LED lights, true bypass, 9V DC AC adaptor included
- **DIMENSIONS** 146 (w) x 121 (d) x 64mm (h)
- **CONTACT** www.ehx.com

Tremolo is one of the staple electric guitar effects, intertwined in the evolution of the instrument, from DeArmond's late 1940s water-based pedals, to Fender's iconic onboard amp 'vibrato' tremolo circuits and modern pedalboard standards such as the Boss TR-2.

Electro-Harmonix has taken all that history and blasted it into space, turning a simple effect into a phenomenal musical tool. The Super Pulsar offers a dizzying range of features: analogue circuitry; sine, triangle and pulse waveforms; rhythmic patterns; a tap tempo; stereo ins/outs and bags more.

The pedal's rectangular enclosure will be familiar to fans of the EHX range, sporting the same dimensions as the Cathedral Reverb and Deluxe Memory Man. It also comes with a mesmerising light show – eight blue LEDs that pulse in time to the effect rate; if the sonic witchcraft coming from your pedalboard doesn't transfix your audiences, the ethereal disco lights are sure to.

The number of controls on the Super Pulsar may initially prove daunting, and we'd advise reading the manual thoroughly – no matter how tempted you are to dive straight in. So, let's dive straight in...

In use

The Super Pulsar quickly proves to be a highly creative instrument that sparks songwriting ideas. Subtle amp tremolo, rhythmic patterns, stereo panning and reverse effects are all at your disposal. Set the Wave knob to Pulse, with Shape around 9 o'clock and pair it with some reverb, and a simple arpeggio turns into a huge, throbbing ambient wash. Add an EBow to the mix to double the fun.

Beyond 12 o'clock on the Wave knob, you enter rhythmic territory. Select a pattern, strike a chord and the repeats gallop away into the distance at preset intervals. It's like cheating at the guitar.

If the sonic witchcraft coming from your pedalboard doesn't transfix audiences, the ethereal disco lights are sure to

Venturing further down the rabbit hole, the envelope depth and rate controls create enormously inventive sounds. These two mini knobs link the effect speed to your picking dynamics – the intensity increases or decreases as the string vibration slows. We now find it hard to resist ending all our songs by chopping a chord and listening as the tremolo slows and the sound dies.

All of this is wonderful fun on your own, yet can be tricky to harness with a band. However, the tap tempo function is your friend, and the tap divide switch splits the tap into seven note types. Unless you have a comprehensive command of music theory or a degree in applied mathematics, though, it's back to the manual here. We found the pedal's busy surface, with 15 knobs, stomp switches and buttons a little troublesome to negotiate 'live'. Accidentally hitting the xRate button mid-song resulted not in the gentle *Twin Peaks*-style throb we wanted, but the angry Dalek gargle of a ring modulator. It's advisable to use the Super Pulsar's eight preset locations; you might question whether that's enough for a pedal of this depth, but who uses more than eight tremolo effects in one gig?

If you want only subtle amp-like sounds, you may find it tough to justify the RRP of more than £200, and to dedicate so much 'board space, but the Super Pulsar offers infinitely more, and if you take time to explore its vast functionality, you'll be rewarded. In fact, we'd go as far as to say it's the most feature-full, innovative tremolo pedal we've ever encountered.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... For a range of stereo tremolo sounds in a smaller enclosure, try the **Seymour Duncan Shape Shifter £219**. **Strymon's Flint £279** incorporates reverb, too, and the **Boss TR-2 £85** is a much-loved and more affordable classic.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Hugely creative tool with vast functionality
+ Pulse effect sounds incredible
+ Rhythmic tremolo effects are highly inventive
+ Ability to connect expression pedal

- Some players may want room for more than eight presets
- Envelope depth and rate and xRate controls are small and fiddly

Whatever kind of tremolo sound you want, the Super Pulsar has it covered – and it may change the way you think about and use the effect, too.
A supremely creative pedal

9/10

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

Stand Out in the Crowd

System 10 Stompbox Digital Wireless Guitar System

The innovative digital wireless guitar system from Audio-Technica that fits right on your pedal board. Pair up to 8 guitars with separate body pack transmitters for easy on stage changeovers, and either mute, tune or use a second rig with the A-B switching. With a discreet clip bodypack, sturdy metal pedal casing, and no large intrusive aerials, it is ready to go straight from the box to the stage. Operating on the 2.4GHz range, it is also both interference and wireless license free.

www.audio-technica.com

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Martin GPCRSGT

This Mexican-made acoustic offers the illustrious Martin name for less than a grand, but is it ready for the road? **RICK BATEY** finds out

KEY FEATURES

Martin GPCRSGT

- **PRICE** £959, inc. hardcase
- **DESCRIPTION** Electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top, solid sapele back and sides, black Boltaron front binding only, single ring rosette, one-piece select hardwood neck, Richlite fingerboard and bridge, Style 28 white ABS fingerboard inlay
- **HARDWARE** Ebony bridge, Corian nut, Tusq saddle, enclosed tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Sonitone USB with soundhole vol/tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 645mm/25.4"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 23mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.12kg/4.6lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, at no extra charge
- **FINISH** Satin with gloss top
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution **www.westsidedistribution.com**

Maintaining a busy gigging schedule can be hellish on both body and soul, and having a guitar that functions really well but which isn't a family heirloom can take a big weight off the mind. Martin's GPCRSGT is designed to fill exactly that slot in your life.

Breaking down the tongue-twister of a model name, 'GP' indicates a Grand Performance body – much like an OM in style, but .75 of an inch wider and just shy of half an inch deeper. 'C' means cutaway, which improves the accessibility of the 14-fret neck; 'R' is Road Series and 'GT' means gloss top (the back, sides and neck are satin). In terms of woods, we have a solid sitka top – cosmetically not the highest grade, although it looks rather attractive. Under the hood, we get scalloped sitka spruce bracing in a 'hybrid X' pattern. The back and sides are solid sapele, and the one-piece neck is made from what Martin describes carefully as 'select hardwood' to keep the door open for whatever it has on hand that's best for the job (the chances are it's either sipo or Spanish cedar). The fingerboard and bridge are both ebony-like Richlite and the trim is dead simple, with front binding only, small ABS position markers and a faux-rosewood headstock facing, which is a bit of a shame. With the action at a very acceptable medium, the saddle is showing a bare 3mm above the bridge... some buyers might be happier with just a shade more on display.

In terms of specification, it's all very practical, then, although the Fishman Sonitone's USB function for DI-ing to a PC/Mac wouldn't get too much use, we suspect, in a pro studio. Nor would it be for our own rare moments of travelling inspiration, where we'd be more likely to just reach for a mobile phone and use a recording app with the built-in mic.

The GPC is loud enough and well balanced between warm and chimey with a burnished blurry quality

In use

This Martin is made in the Mexican factory 2,700 miles away from Nazareth, PA, but as always the company has managed to incorporate enough of that signature sound into its affordable line to live up to the name on the headstock. The GPC is loud enough and well balanced between warm and chimey, with an agreably burnished, blurry quality on the strum, clear, full trebles and a healthy soupçon of nutty bottom end. The Fishman Sonitone does that undersaddle thing acceptably well, with reasonable string balance, and there are volume and tone wheels inside the soundhole. The GPC plays really well, too, as the slim Performing Artist profile with its 1.75-inch nut vanishes nicely under the hand. Tuning stability and intonation are both tip-top.

Realistically, this guitar has got tough competition. Less money, in another brand, can buy a solid rosewood back and sides, a real ebony fingerboard and an all-gloss finish, so the GPC has to rely on its tone and name for its appeal. It isn't your desert-island fantasy Martin, but it's sturdily built, sounds bright and even, plays easily and in tune all the way up the neck, and – with the caveat that the Sonitone system may satisfy some players but not others – it's the kind of guitar the majority of us would be happy to take out on a 30-date tour. Just no shared rooms, please.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The ever-reliable **Taylor 114ce £860** has a laminated sapele back and sides. The **Faith FVHG £819** and the **Guild F-150CE £808** both up the ante with a gloss finish and solid rosewood back and sides. All three are electros with hardwood fingerboards.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Useful all-rounder
+ Slim neck, good playability
+ Richlite board is low-maintenance and avoids endangered hardwood problem
+ Pleasant Martin-esque tone

– Not great value on specs alone
– Fishman Sonitone is pretty basic

Road by name, road by nature – it's a real plug-in-and-go guitar, and with a posher acoustic sound than its looks imply

7/10

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ELX-540-ADV-EN-AUG15

Sandberg California II VM4 & TM5

Here's a pair of new basses from German company Sandberg; one pristine, one less so... **GARETH MORGAN** investigates

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

It's been two decades since Fender launched its first Relics at NAMM, and the years since have seen numerous manufacturers follow in the big F's wake and inflict intentional age and wear marks on their instruments. We've already had one taste of German company Sandberg's version of this strand of faux ageing, via the MarloweDK bass, with its Hardcore Aged finish. This month, we have a remodelled California II TM5 that's been treated to the newly-concocted Hardcore Aged Reserve (HAR) process. We also have a new VM4 which, where the TM errs on the J Bass side, is firmly P-influenced. Note that as these are hand-built instruments, you can tweak many of the specs, although many incur additional costs – for instance, the basic TM5 is only £1,299.

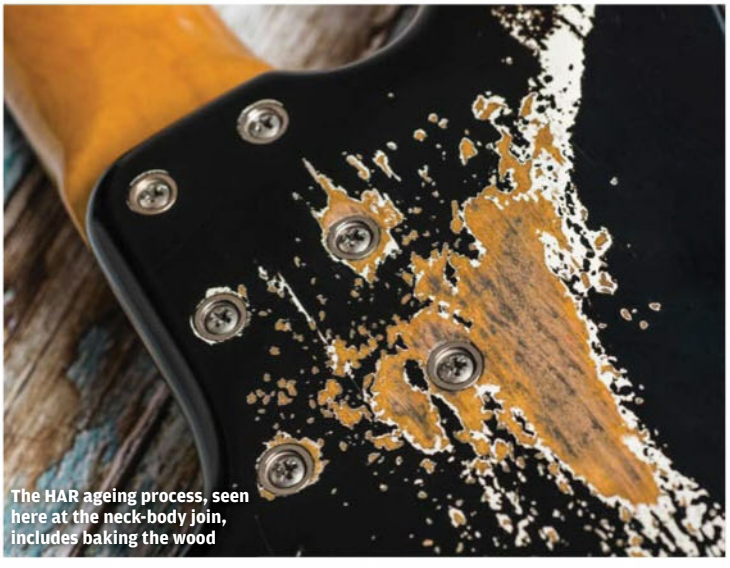
TM5

Sandberg's MkII California series doesn't ditch all its original Fender references, the bodies being subtly remodelled, creating intelligent and visually appealing variations on the classic templates with a strong identity. Here, the redesigned J-type shape is a few millimetres shorter and the bulbous lower-rear bout more moderately proportioned, allowing Sandberg to downsize the lower half, leaving Musicman StingRay overtones. The lower cutaway is deeper, and the horn shorter, but Sandberg has left well alone with the top half, and the vibe at the top horn is still forward-leaning.

The main interest with the European ash body stems from its HAR finish, which adds £585 to the cost and a week to completion time. This bridges the antiquation gap between Hardcore (£275) and Hardcore Masterpiece (£980) ageing. With HAR, the neck is also treated, and aside from fun with various files and sanders, HAR includes baking the wood to simulate the process, giving a played-in vibe >

Aside from fun with various files and sanders, HAR includes baking the wood, giving a played-in vibe

Both basses feature Sandberg Lightweight tuners



The HAR ageing process, seen here at the neck-body join, includes baking the wood

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

TM5

Fender offers a **Road Worn '60s Jazz Bass (£1,199)**, although it takes a more subtle approach to the process. If you're really keen, check out the wares of American company **Nash Guitars** (from around **£1,900)**, which offer aged versions of designs that you may recognise.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

VM4

The **Musicman Classic Sabre 4-string Bass £2,029** is a less well-known, more versatile offering without forgetting its roots. Or, for a more contemporary take, how about a **Warwick Streamer $$ (Double Buck) (£2,360)**? Fiercely contemporary styling coupled with an excellent variety of great sounds.

Ageing detail on the heel of the TM5

Both the VM4 and TM5 have bolt-on maple necks

to both tone and appearance, especially as hardware, pickguard and pickups are also aged. Ageing is another finishing option you either like or you don't, and we must admit to being fans when it's done as well as this. The neck is a maple/rosewood fingerboard combo with 22 medium nickel frets, Sandberg Lightweight tuners and Vintage High Mass bridge. Hitched to a Sandberg preamp are one Delano T-style single coil at the bridge and a Delano M-style humbucker – the latter with coil-tap switch for single-coil mode. The controls consist of volume, balance, bass and treble.

Ageing is a finishing option you either like or you don't, and we must admit to being fans when it's done as well as this

VM4

The VM4 has been similarly tweaked in the vista department, the alder body's previously even rear bouts now having a decidedly offset vibe, the lower horn has less mass and the cutaway is deeper. These alterations alone amount to a body that's slightly smaller, and instead of the expected 4.3kg of a basic P shape, the VM4 weighs in at 3.95kg – not a staggering difference, but every little helps! You also get a remodelled pickguard, the white against white vibe of pickguard to finish being a particularly classy feature. The top half is as of old, with comfort facilities and familiar dorsal fin horn. Sandberg hitches up a dot-free rosewood fingerboard to the maple neck wagon, with 22 medium nickel frets, and the hardware again consists of Sandberg Lightweight tuners and Vintage High Mass bridge, without the intentional blemishing of the chrome finish. There's also the tension-enhancing string tree you'll find present on all Sandberg basses.

The standard active electronics with Sandberg preamp are hooked up to the Splitcoil pickup in neck position and Powerhumbucker at the bridge, although sans the coil-tap switch of

The serial number is found on the back of the headstock

The VM4's Vintage High Mass bridge

The headstock on the four-string VM4

the TM for obvious reasons. Controls number volume (pull for passive mode), balance and a two-band EQ.

TM5

Of the two coil-tap modes, the humbucker/single-coil option is the most solid and has the most stature, with plenty of bottom-end width and a pleasing growl to the E string. There's an excellent evenness of response across the fretboard, and the midrange tone is dark and aggressive with plenty of punch. This also means thinner strings are fat and solid enough for practical melodic groove playing. Whilst clarity is not an issue, there's a slight metallic zing on the G string, suggesting that highs are being overshadowed by high mids, although this effectively acts as 'contemporary clarity'. It becomes a more dominating element in single-coil mode, and whilst enhancing the audibility of lower notes, the adenoidal twang on thinner strings can be irritating. Individual pickups offer an earthy, acoustically nuanced variation and gurgly finger-funk, but when you involve the EQ, the TM5 has lift-off. Dialling in bass reduces the zingy edge and increases width, reducing the snappiness in note definition without hitting clarity heavily – a great option for solid rock or pop groove playing. If you boost the treble, there's a hike to the highs, not mids, and employing slap technique gets joyously big and aggressive results. With the bridge pickup, dialling in bass creates a powerful, snappily-defined, modern funk tone that's wide enough to do its job but funky enough to groove hard. The neck pickup sound also benefits from more weight behind its rootsy old-school vibe.

VM4

We found that, whilst imbued with decent width and aggression, there was a wirey quality to the VM's basic noise, almost a slight weakness in output, so we reached for the bass dial. Half boost creates a more up-front sound with depth and power, growling at the bottom end, and dark and aggressive in the midrange with plenty of slightly stunted top-end clarity. Dialling in treble provokes a snappy, slicing edge to thinner strings and more overall harmonic life – perfect for metal. Whilst soloing, the neck pickup brings hints of the P Bass, while the VM has more authority, with much more rasp and aggression across the neck. Boosting the treble gets more snap before re-awakening the wiry clank on full boost – it's fun and almost pick-like. Bass boost also uncorks a warm, fat gurgly funk tone at the bridge, where your note is given real purpose.

KEY FEATURES
TM5

- **PRICE** £1,884 with padded gigbag (basic model from £1,299)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody bass. Made in Germany
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 22 medium nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Sandberg Lightweight tuners and Vintage High Mass bridge. Aged nickel hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Active with two Delano pickups, T-style single coil (bridge) and M-style humbucker, Sandberg preamp
- **CONTROLS** Master volume (pull for passive), balance, bass and treble, two-way coil tap switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes at no extra cost
- **FINISHES** Any matte and selected high-gloss, aged
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 64mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 9mm at nut, 18mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.3kg/9.5lb
- **CONTACT** Synergy Distribution (0121) 270 6485 www.synergydistribution.co.uk

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classy take on classic styling
+ Wonderful build quality, aged finish not overdone
+ Solid, practical sounds
+ Responsive all over the neck

– Could be cleaner at the top end
– Maybe needs a three-band EQ

A fine instrument in the high-quality, workhorse stakes. If you're after the aged vibe, look no further

9/10

KEY FEATURES
VM4

- **PRICE** £1,175 with padded gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody bass. Made in Germany
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 22 medium nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Sandberg Lightweight tuners and Vintage High Mass bridge. Chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Active with one Sandberg Splitcoil pickup (neck) and one Powerhumbucker (bridge)
- **CONTROLS** Master volume (pull for passive), balance, bass and treble
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes at no extra cost
- **FINISHES** Any matte and selected high-gloss colours, aged
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm (34")
- **NECK WIDTH** 40mm at nut, 56mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 11mm at nut, 120mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.94kg/8.66lb
- **CONTACT** Synergy Distribution (0121) 270 6485 www.synergydistribution.co.uk

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

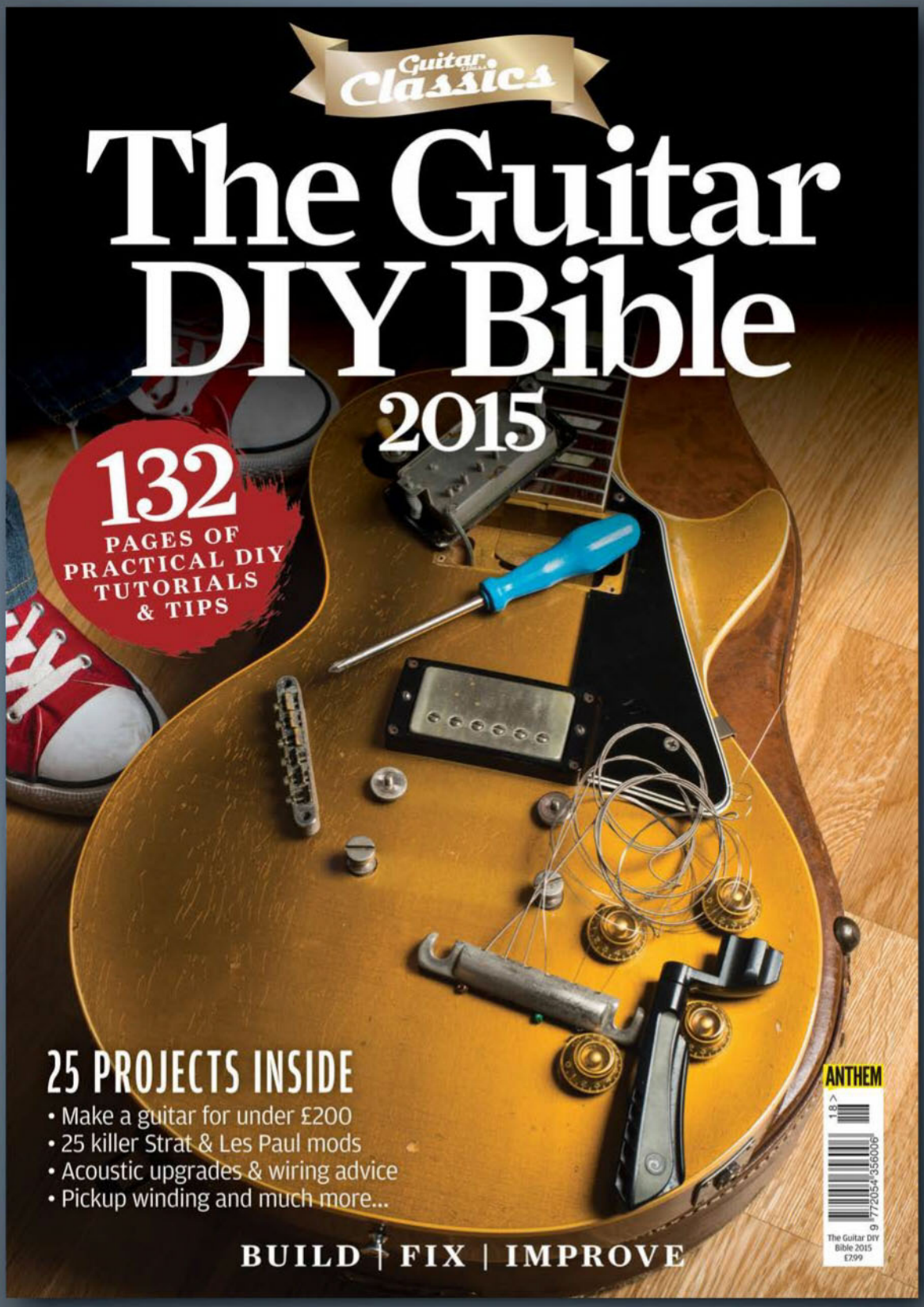
+ Another fine-looking and well-made bass
+ Delivers a good selection of solid, practical sounds for varied groove playing
+ Well balanced in all aspects

– Highs could be more explosive

A good option if you're in the market for a solid grooving four-string with just that little extra

8/10

FROM THE MAKERS OF Guitar & Bass



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Six of the best

When it comes to bass combos, there are heaps of options out there. Here are some of the best ones...

Peavey Tour TKO 115

PRICE £447 **CONTACT** www.peavey.com

Peavey's 400-watt TKO 115 is an excellent example of top-notch, affordable bass wares. Weighing 33kg (70lb) and wearing a mottled vinyl overcoat, the TKO is made in China, its domed grille creates an appealing contemporary vista and it can be tilted for monitoring. Loaded with one USA-designed Peavey 15-inch speaker and a well-attenuated tweeter, the basic EQ section is complemented by a seven-band slider graphic and bright and contour (mid-scoop) switches. It delivers a thick, detailed tone with zingy highs and a good range of practical variations. Plus you can plug in an extension speaker for extra boom.

PJB Suitcase Compact

PRICE £799 **CONTACT** www.pjbworld.com

PJB's 300-watt Suitcase Compact is worth a mention for its diminutive stature and PJB's unusual but superb five-inch Piranha speakers. Add another cabinet for the full 500 watts or use alone as a tiny boombox with handy twin-channel preamp, each sporting simple, intuitive three-band EQs. The amount of boom is a real surprise; add tight, aggressive impact and bright, clean highs without clickiness, and you've got a high-quality bass sound. The onboard limiter is useful, and it all weighs a paltry 18kg (40lbs).

Laney Richter RB7

PRICE £486 **CONTACT** www.laney.co.uk

The RB7, from Blighty's own Laney, is another keenly-priced gigging combo that's made in China, and arrives in the form of a carpet-covered, monitor-shaped box with a businesslike steel grille protecting two Custom 10-inch drivers. This combo is competitively priced, a reasonable weight (24kg/53lbs) and has simple bass, treble and presence controls, plus a seven-band midrange slider EQ for tonal shaping shenanigans and switchable limiter. This gets you a clean, punchy, full-range tone, but you can also conjure some tight, fat lows, brooding punch in the midrange and slicing highs with just a few simple tweaks.

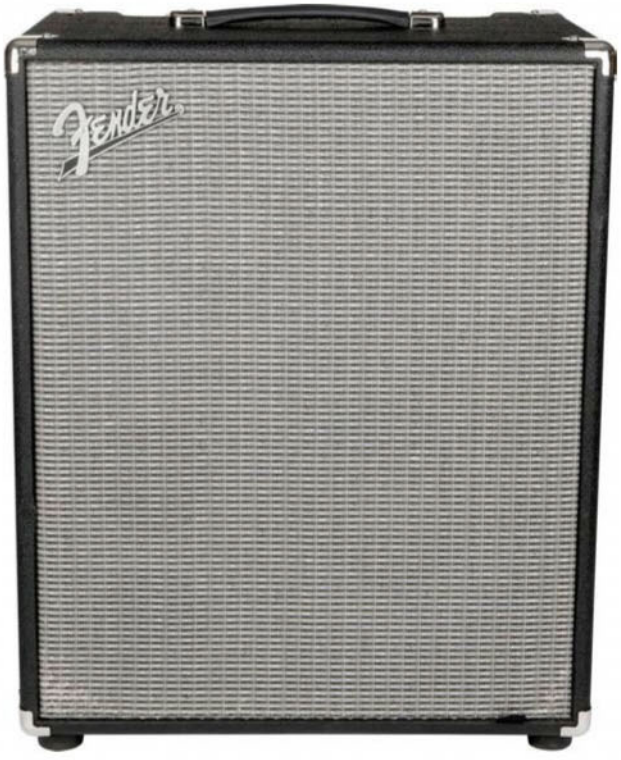
Peavey's 400W TKO 115 is an excellent example of top-notch, affordable bass wares... delivering a thick, detailed tone with zingy highs

Ampeg's BA-210 delivers plenty of growling bass, clean midrange and some truly exuberant highs, which will take the top of your head off if you dare to engage the tweeter

Ampeg BA-210 V2

PRICE £458 **CONTACT** www.ampeg.com

For many bassists, Ampeg has been rather special ever since the company's all-tube SVT behemoth appeared in the 60s. The 450-watt BA-210, at 22kg (48lbs), is a more conservative beast, with classic black Tolex skin, twin Ampeg 10-inch speakers (plus mutable tweeter), blendable Bass Scrambler overdrive and extension speaker capability. Tone shaping is via its three-band EQ, with pre-shaping courtesy of the traditional Ultra Lo and Hi switches. The BA-210 delivers plenty of growling bass, clean midrange and some truly exuberant highs, which will take the top of your head off if you dare engage the tweeter.



Fender Rumble 500

PRICE £480 **CONTACT** www.fender.com

Fender has produced some really good bass amps of late, the splendid Indonesian-made Rumble 500 being a prime example. 16.5kg (36.5lbs) represents excellent power (350 watts) and portability with a silver grille cloth protecting two Eminence 10-inch drivers adding familiar class. Ignore the three preset EQ shapes, as the magic really happens courtesy of a simple four-band EQ, which uncorks oodles of width, punchy mids and slicing highs. The horn is lively but mutable, you can add another speaker and there's also onboard distortion (drive), that's limited but great fun.

Warwick BC 300

PRICE £458 **CONTACT** www.warwickbass.com

Warwick's amps have a far lower profile than its basses, but there's still plenty to shout about. Rated at 300 watts, the BC 300 is the most powerful of six combos, with a domed front creating a resolutely contemporary vibe. Speakers number one 15-inch Warwick Custom unit and a four-inch HF horn; the EQ system has bass and treble controls, augmented by a 10-band slider graphic. There's onboard compression with level control and extension speaker capability which, given the fat, detailed, full-range nature of the tone on offer, adds up to a good little unit.

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Fender

Pick of the bunch

Guitars come and go, but once a player finds the right pick it's surprising how loyal they can become. Herco's nylon picks were used by many star players, and now these classics are back, thanks to Dunlop.

Story **Marcus Leadley**

Herco picks were there right at the beginning of the rock 'n' roll story. The Hershman Musical Instrument company of New York was set up in 1940. The first picks that Jerry and Eddy managed to get off the production line were made from a non-celluloid plastic; there were three or four shapes and the gauge was extremely heavy. Quality control was loose to say the least; however, all looked slightly different due to the admixture of brown and white pigment. Today's pick collectors often refer to them as 'Bastard Browns'.

During the mid-1950s, at the same time that Leo Fender was launching the Stratocaster, Hershman started to get more serious about peripherals, and a dedicated accessories division was set up. The company itself was doing well; its new Goya range was one of the first to target the growing market for instruments and amps at the mid-price and budget areas of the market. The first new picks of the era were known as the 720 Counter Top Assortment. They were made from celluloid, manufactured in Japan and came in 11 basic shapes, plus thumb picks and finger picks. There were a couple of colour variations, but they were essentially made from mottled celluloid in a range of 'tortoiseshell' colourations. A number of the picks featured an unusual glued-on cork grip. The range was hugely successful and remained available to players until the 80s. It's worth noting that Herco was essentially the highest-profile distributor for these picks and the same items, dispensed from boxes branded to Ibanez, Lindell, Ventura and Segovia, were available at the same time.

As guitar music became more and more popular in the 1960s, there was a growing demand for budget picks and Herco turned to nylon (the company called it Flexylon). Three new lines were launched in 1966, and this was when sales really started to take off. First, there was an ultra-budget range of green picks. They were aimed at the teenage player with only pocket money to spend, and they came in six shapes. The injection moulding process wasn't perfect and photos of the era indicate the presence of excess material around the edges and marks where they were separated from the mould stem.

Despite the success of the Bold Golds and the Hi-Yo Silvers, Herco's quest for pick excellence continued

Premium range

At the same time, a premium range of nylon picks (at roughly twice the price) was launched. There was the thin-gauge gold HE210, which became know as the Bold Gold, and the heavier-gauge HE211, the so-called Hi-Yo Silver – despite the fact they were also made in white. These two picks are the ones that became associated with players such as Jimmy Page, Joe Walsh, Scott Gorham, Brian Robertson, Pete Townshend, David Gilmour, Don Felder, Tommy Bolin, Rory Gallagher, Gary Moore and Chris Squire.

These picks remained in production, unchanged, until the Herco pick brand was sold to Dunlop in 1992, at which point modified gold and silver Herco-branded picks, the Flex 50 and Flex 75, went into production (not to be confused with the earlier Herco Flex series picks of the late-1970s).

Despite the success of the Bold Golds and the Hi-Yo Silvers, Herco's quest for pick excellence continued. In the mid-70s, the company launched its blue ('Bugablue') standard shape HE209 and HE212, which was a triangular pick but with rounded edges. These were

ROUTE '66

While Dunlop has offered gold and silver Herco Flex picks since 1992, the addition of the Vintage '66 picks represents a specific commitment to vintage authenticity. "Last year," says Jimmy Dunlop, "we discovered several pick moulds had been stashed away in storage ever since we acquired Herco 20 years ago. When I realised they were the moulds used to create the very first Herco nylon picks, I immediately knew that I wanted to recreate that classic pick magic."

The original moulds were beyond use, but by playing and studying original picks it was possible to re-engineer the original Bold Gold and Hi-Yo Silver. Dunlop also added an Extra Light white pick.

"There are two important differences between the Herco Flex Series and the Herco '66 Series," adds Dunlop. "The Flex picks have a grip on both sides, while the Vintage '66 picks have a grip on one side. Grips add stiffness, so Vintage '66 picks are more flexible.

"After that, we analysed the pick material itself. Nylon is made differently today than it was 40 years ago, and that bears out in the sound and feel of a pick. We had to tweak different parameters to come up with a formula that perfectly captures the tone and feel of that old-school nylon – it's virtually indistinguishable. Because the Vintage '66 picks are designed with the characteristics of the older nylon, they have a warmer sound and a smoother attack."

ultra-thin nylon picks, designed to give a particularly percussive edge to the guitar's sound, and were therefore particularly good for certain types of acoustic rhythm. Another line of budget pics, the 'Dynamite Whites', was also launched mid-way through the 70s. They were available in three basic shapes – standard, large triangle and small triangle (both with rounded edges), and in thin, medium and hard gauges. Towards the end of the decade, the Flex series reached the stores. There were four shapes. The first three, a pointed teardrop (Flex 40), a triangle (Flex 48) with straight sides and a triangle with rounded edges (Flex 60) were made from light brown nylon. Curiously, the Flex 55, the most standard-shaped pick in the group, was manufactured in bright orange.

Urban legend?

Herco's final stab at innovation came in 1980, with the release of a line of picks referred to as the 'Axe Handlers'. The company's publicity of the day highlights the unique material developed for the production of what were essentially US handmade picks. They were designed and produced by Robert Zaidman, and over the six-month run there were around 20 basic shapes of pick. The material was custom-engineered for tone and durability. Each pick was hand-finished and coated with a special compound. Axe Handlers came in red, green, yellow and brown. Some believe that the brown Axe Handlers were actually surplus 1940s stock that was re-released when the company's marketing was much improved. This may, of course, simply be an urban legend.

Visit www.jimdunlop.com for more information on Herco picks

VOX

Vintage BENCH TEST

1954 & 1957 LES PAUL GOLDTOPS

Forget the flames and blingy 'Bursts, this month we check out two gold Les Pauls from the mid 1950s. **HUW PRICE** chooses the one that sets the Standard

Welcome to the first in a new series in which we get up close and personal with an array of vintage guitars and find out what makes them tick. Over the coming months, we'll be looking at a range of instruments from investment-grade holy grails to more affordable players' guitars that you wouldn't be scared to take out in public. First though, here's a pair of golden oldies with more than a little mojo...

"Here's proof that not all 50s-era Les Pauls were lightweight lovelies. This is a 'whole lot of Goldie'"

'54 All Gold

Due to the absence of a serial number, I can't say for sure when this Les Paul was made. The wrapover bridge ears are ¼-inch thick, which suggests 1955, but the bridge and posts could have been changed. On the other hand, the pickup spacing is 3 1/8 inches rather than 3 inches, so that corresponds with 1954 and earlier.

Schallers were installed at some point, but five of the 1953-56-era no-line Kluson tuners are back on the guitar, plus one later Kluson. Three original IRC pots have survived, and the one I pulled out dated to the 15th week of 1953. Since we'll never know for sure, let's split the difference and call this a late-54.

The missing serial number indicates the back of the neck may have been refinished. It is possible because this is actually an all-gold Les Paul, so you would expect the neck to be gold rather than brown.

In the buckle rash area, you can see gold was applied over the standard pale brown finish. Theoretically, the body could have been sprayed gold later, and there is some overspray in the control cavity, but that doesn't explain the missing serial number. An odd opaque patch on the back of the headstock may be evidence of an original gold finish that was carefully removed to reveal the brown beneath, or imperfect preparation prior to a respray. All I can be certain of is the neck finish is very old. The body's 'undercoat' perfectly matches the neck, and any modifications most likely happened decades ago, because the neck black lights just like the rest of the guitar. A screwed-up page from the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the non-original case indicates it may have spent some time down under. Besides one pot and one tuner, everything you'd expect to find on a Les Paul of this vintage is present and correct.

In use

Here's proof that not all 50s-era Les Pauls were lightweight lovelies. Weighing in at 10lbs, this is a 'whole lot of Goldie' with a chunky neck to match. Even the acoustic tone has weight, and you can perform a fun experiment with the wrapover. Tune to open D, strum a chord with your left hand then place your right palm against the back of the bridge, taking care not to mute any strings. Volume and sustain decrease noticeably and harmonic overtones are lost, so the featherweight aluminium bridge, and the way it's coupled to the >

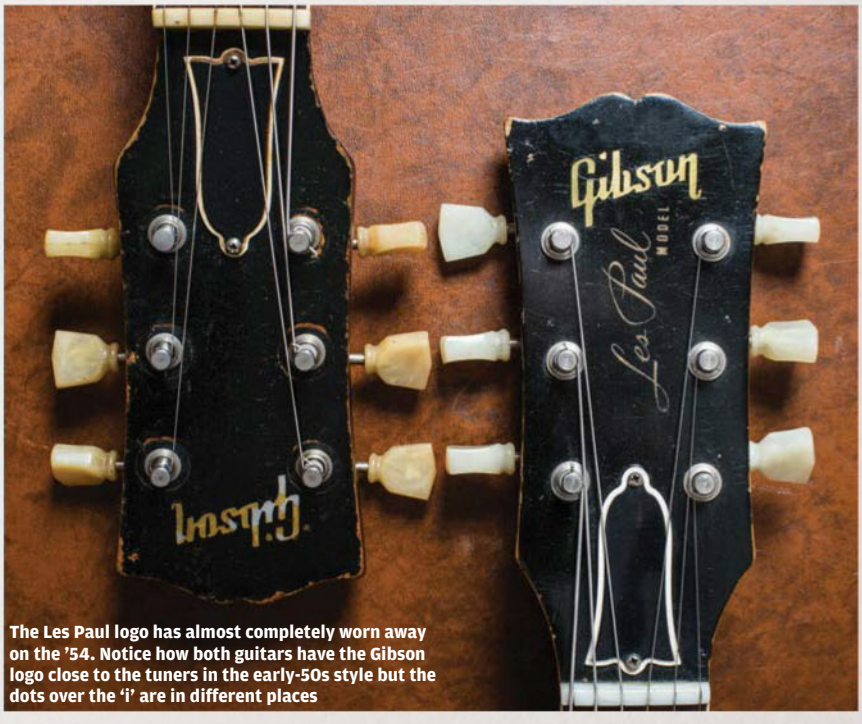
KEY FEATURES

1954 All Gold

- **SCALE LENGTH** 624mm/24 9/16"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 50mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.53Kg/10lb
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**

1957 Goldtop

- **SCALE LENGTH** 626mm/24.5/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37.5mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4Kg/9lb
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**



The Les Paul logo has almost completely worn away on the '54. Notice how both guitars have the Gibson logo close to the tuners in the early-50s style but the dots over the 'i' are in different places

heavyweight body, strongly influence the tone. The 7.7K bridge pickup combines bite and twang with vintage quack and a hint of cocked wah snarl. It adds up to a fabulous clean tone with an underlying air of menace. In contrast, the neck, which is wound to 10K, sounds very fat and creamy, but doesn't overpower. The extra windings certainly don't detract from the clarity, with plenty of woodiness coming through.

Even in clean mode, this pickup has a rottweiler-like tendency to hang onto single notes, with plenty of bloom. Given the disparity in resistance readings, one of the pickups may have been rewound at some point, but I didn't dismantle the guitar to check.

Cranking up the amp transformed the bridge tone into a huge grinding bark that's simply perfect for classic-rock riffing. The neck delivers a bluesy singing quality that has enough substance and sustain for soling without recourse to pedals. No wonder Freddie King preferred recording with one of these, and the story goes that Clapton wanted a Goldtop to emulate his hero but had to settle for a 'Burst instead. The standout setting is both pickups on; in clean mode, it reveals the '54 at its

Top, left to right, **The play wear transitions from the neck heel to the body perfectly. If the back of the neck was resprayed, it was done decades ago; towards the left of this shot, the finish has worn away to bare wood. In the centre, you can see the lighter brown finish that you'd expect to find on a regular Goldtop. The gold finish was sprayed over the light brown finish**
Right, **This '54 has extensive verdigris and the green areas are proud of the gold layer. Run your finger over the surface and it feels not unlike alligator leather**
Opposite page, **Gibson called these straight-sided controls 'speed knobs' and they're correct for a Goldtop of this era**

most delicate and complex. You can dial in a vast range of tonal colours, too, thanks to controls that perform their designated functions without any annoying side effects.

'57 Goldtop

Having researched early PAF-loaded Goldtops, this example could be from the first month of production. All the features check out, including the black plastic parts and brushed stainless steel pickup covers that pre-dated the 'Patent Applied For' stickers and nickel covers. Also present are the thinner switch ring, black pickup ring screws and the low-set peghead logo. Some sources suggest Goldtops with black plastics should have dark backs. This guitar's body and neck are light brown, despite having a serial number that falls bang in the middle of the range that supposedly corresponds with the black plastics.

When you catch the top at the right angle, you can discern flame maple under the gold, and a three-piece top. The indications are it was played mostly by a rhythm guitarist, because there's a mark beneath the pickguard and all of the neck wear is confined to the cowboy end.

The frets may not be to everybody's taste, and they're certainly not the type commonly associated with Les Pauls. Even compared to the '54's, this is narrow and low-ish wire. It doesn't look as if the frets have worn to any great extent, so maybe they were relatively low to begin with.

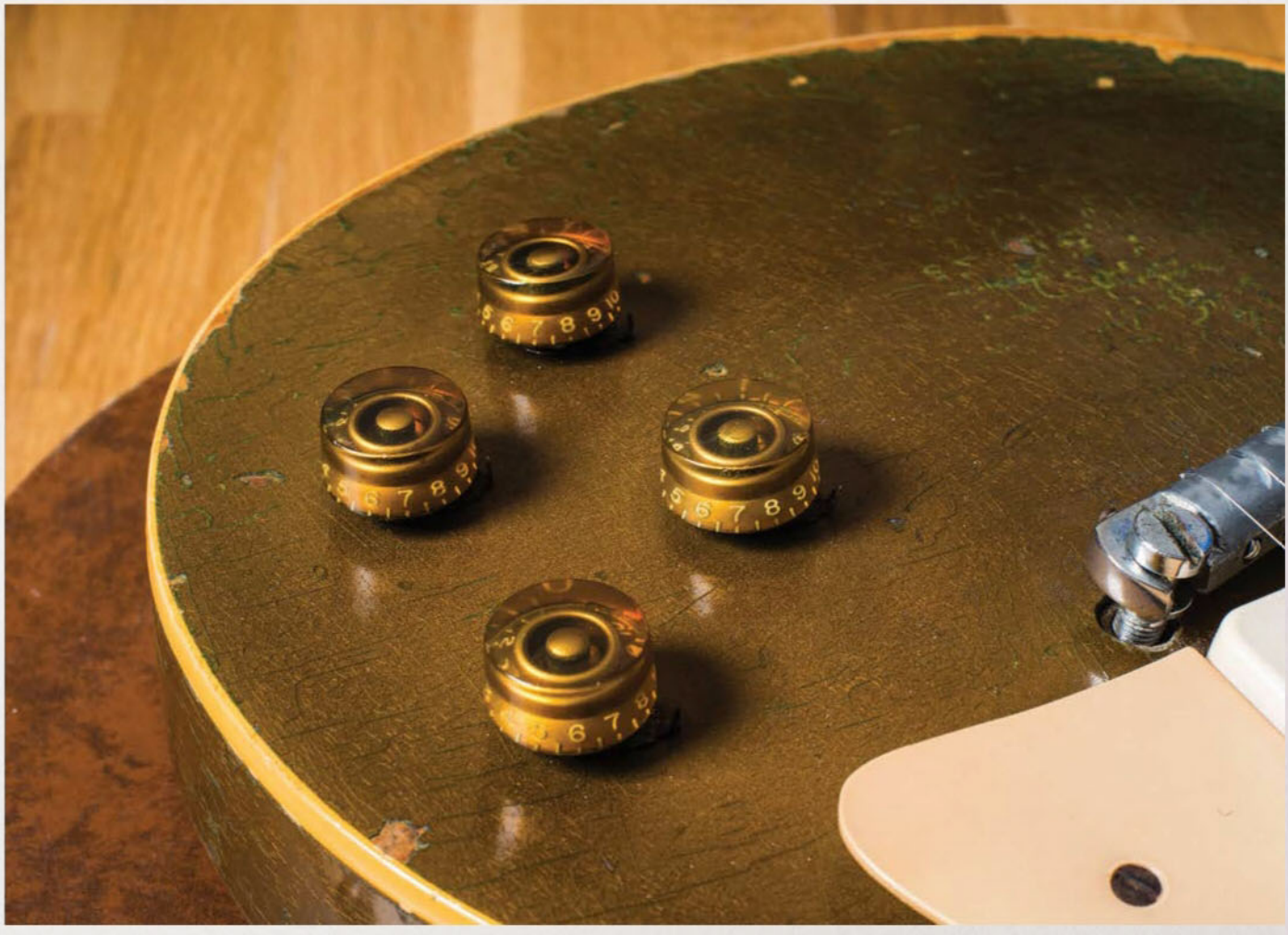
In use

Although the guitar plays flawlessly with no buzzing or choking out, most players would find bluesy bends and finger vibrato easier with more substantial frets. Guitars such as this, which are so original and unworn, can present owners with re-fret dilemmas.

"Cranking up the amp transformed the bridge tone into a grinding bark that's perfect for classic-rock riffs"

The originality versus playability issue has been done to death, so let's not get into that. Instead, I would argue the narrowness of the frets has a noticeable effect on the tone of this '57. The front end of notes sound extremely crisp and defined, with an edge that lends the '57 an unusually articulate, precise quality. It's not dissimilar to the snap and bite more often associated with Fenders, but there's loads more body and sustain.

Wider frets might make it sound and play more like a '59, but I hope that if anybody does eventually refret this guitar, they'll consider going with taller >



Below, **Gibson called these straight-sided controls 'speed knobs' and they're correct for a Goldtop of this era**

Above, **As you'd expect from a very early '57, there's no 'Patent Applied For' decal, and the covers are brushed stainless steel**

narrow wire, rather than the usual jumbo wire. They'll get enough purchase under the strings for bending and finger vibrato, but it'll retain the distinctive '57 tone rather than replicate a (slightly) poorer man's 'Burst.

Acoustically, this Goldtop probably has more natural resonance than any humbucker-equipped Les Paul I've played, and I can include a handful of 'Bursts amongst them. Beneath the chimey, crisp treble, there's a hollow woodiness that could fool you into thinking it's a chambered body – if it weren't for the astonishing solidbody sustain. It also holds its tuning superbly, and although some saddles are adjusted to their limits, the intonation is perfect.

The neck pickup is very slightly more microphonic, and although both ohm out at a fraction over 7.1K, the sonic contrast is profound. At full throttle, the bridge setting is aggressive, with a noticeable midrange quack and a jangly chime. The neck sounds wide open and clear, lending jazzy texture to chords and a vocal quality to single notes.

Other characteristics, such as amazing touch sensitivity and harmonic complexity, are common to both. Add a touch of overdrive then play a powerchord and you can hear different harmonic overtones drifting in and out as it slowly fades away. The effect is so intriguing it's very hard to put this guitar down. The middle setting is out of phase. Looking closely, neither pickup cover appears to have been removed to flip a magnet, but the pickups have been out at some point and the original bumblebee capacitors are not wired 50s-style. The tampered solder joints are also sloppy compared to those done in the Gibson factory.

"Acoustically, it probably has more resonance than any humbucker-equipped Les Paul I've played"

The low frets and the rewiring are the only things that detract from this spectacular Les Paul. It can be smooth or nasty, sweet or aggressive and biting or mellow. Just like the '54, music flows out of this guitar.

Compare and contrast

Like so many mid-50s Gibsons I've had the pleasure of playing, both Les Pauls instantly felt as if I'd been playing them for years. This unusual sensation wasn't down to a generic profile or action that just happened to be where I like it.

There is something about the necks Gibsons was carving during this part of the 50s that's supremely player-friendly. Both are undeniably big necks, but they don't feel clubby or unwieldy. The '54's is more rounded along its entire length, whereas the '57 >

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Above, left to right, **Here, you can see how the stainless steel pickup covers do not have the patination typically seen with nickel. The wear line in the finish suggests the previous owner played a lot of rhythm with the pickguard attached; the bumble bee caps are right, but the wiring isn't. The caps should be soldered to the centre tags of the volume potentiometers**

profile has a subtle refinement with a delicate hint of a V. It starts from the point where the back of the headstock transitions into the neck, then fades to a fully rounded profile by the fifth fret to maintain its roundness all the way to the heel.

Neither neck has any shoulder, and if you view both square-on from the back you can see thin lines of binding and even make out some of the dots. This shows that the profile curve begins nearer the outer edges of the fingerboards than the bottom edges of the binding. So it could be more accurate to describe Gibson's mid-50s profile as a fat and wide C rather than a U or a D.

"I'd find it hard to choose between these guitars. It's like comparing a mid-50s Strat with a mid-60s model"

Although it's fanciful, I'd find it hard to choose between these guitars. It's a bit like comparing a mid-50s Strat with a mid-60s model, because they're so different. I prefer the lighter weight and balance of the '57, but both necks feel amazing. The '54's is a tad more rounded and grippy, while the '57's has a bit more finesse.

They are equally resonant, but in different ways. The '57 is livelier and chimier, but the '55's thicker midrange and solid bass give it more grunt and power. It's reasonable to conclude that the wrapover bridge makes all the difference. Some aficionados claim gold lacquer inhibits vibration and makes Goldtops less resonant than 'Bursts. I'd like to comment on that, but I can't think of a polite word for 'bullshit'.

The PAFs are slightly brighter, with greater subtlety and harmonic complexity. The P-90s have a gutsier midrange and more compressed response, but they don't do note bloom and harmonic overtones to quite the same extent. Many of the other sonic differences between these two sets of pickups coincide with the acoustic characteristics of the host guitars, and the similarities between them are actually more apparent than the differences.

For instance, both neck pickups have a vocal quality, with the PAF winning out by a nose. Both bridge pickups have vintage quack, but this time the P-90s win. Both sets are microphonic and can hang on to single notes for eons. You can also clean up by playing lightly or turning down, without losing clarity or treble response. I'm left wondering if Seth Lover was really shooting for a P-90-style tone minus the hum when he developed the PAF.

At first, I favoured the '54. It delivers such a powerful and exhilarating plug in and play tone it was love at first strum. The '57 reveals its charms gradually and is the more subtle, versatile and refined of the pair. It's also the one that kept drawing me back, because it never stops delivering sonic surprises. In an ideal world, I'd probably choose the '57 – but with a wrapover bridge rather than a tune-o-matic. Hang on... does that sound more like a PRS?

This may be controversial, but I'm not convinced age has worked any magic here. These Les Pauls are from an era when Gibson had access to the best materials and was at the top of its game. I believe these guitars are so great because they were incredibly well made to begin with – but even if age hasn't improved them, it's done them no harm.

JOHN MCVIE
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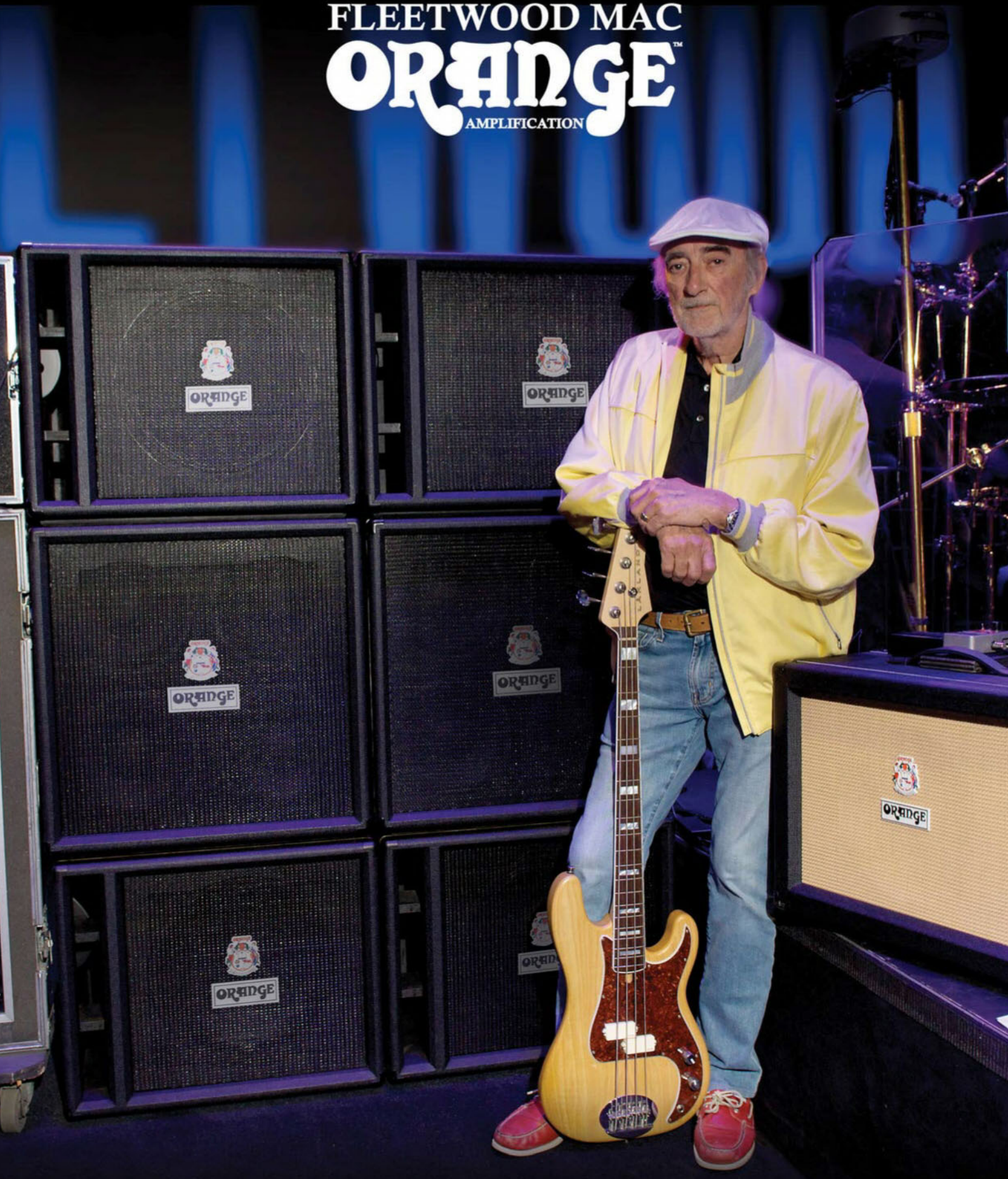

"DELIVERS SOUND THAT MAKES IT A PLEASURE TO HEAR NIGHT AFTER NIGHT"

Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

ECLECTIC WARRIOR

John Etheridge is widely revered for his genre-spanning dexterity on the fretboard. His guitar collection is just as eclectic, as **LARS MULLEN** discovers...

John Etheridge is regarded by many a musician in the business as one of the world's finest guitar players, having pioneered the way for jazz fusion during the 1970s with the British band The Soft Machine.

The vast list of high-profile artists John Etheridge has worked with includes the likes of Andy Summers, Nigel Kennedy, Stéphane Grappelli, Danny Thompson, Dizzy Gillespie, Yehudi Menuhin, John Williams and even Hawkwind, all of whom have witnessed the speed at which Etheridge can play and his ability to deliver a high level of instrument technique and tone.

Like many top jazz players, John has spent decades touring and honing his craft on classic solid, big bodied semi-acoustic and archtop guitars.

"During the early period of The Soft Machine, around 1975, I was using a '62 Fender Stratocaster, which I had bought from bassist Dek Messecar when we were both in the band Darryl Way's Wolf," explains John.

"I used that Strat for ages and it was on the '76 album called *Softs*, which has recently been reissued. I have two here, a '64 sunburst and a '62, which has been taken back to the wood. I have friends who have had Les Pauls and Strats from the 50s and 60s, some are great and some are absolutely horrible. These two Strats are stunning, they both play beautifully, whilst sonically they are very individual.

> *"These two Strats are stunning, they both play beautifully, whilst sonically they are very individual"*

"A Strat is arguably the quintessential guitar, and there's no need to sing its praises here, but whilst I really liked the sound, it just wasn't the right guitar physically for my playing.

"As soon as I changed to a Gibson I found my right hand was more relaxed and I could play faster. I was familiar with the neck profile, as I'd been playing an SG from the age of 15, so I graduated from a Strat to a three-pickup Gibson SG Type 2 Custom. I adored that guitar, it had a really fast neck, but it was stolen in Paris in August 1977.

"I searched high and low for a replacement, but there were very few to be found. I bought a '61 Les Paul Custom as a stop-gap. It had been sprayed black, so I had it refinished back to white and added a third humbucker and a Vibrola system as well. I believe I paid far too much for this one. >

Above left to right, **John Etheridge and his Fret-King Black Label FKV3JE Elise; '64 sunburst Strat (left) and '62 natural Strat; the cracked scratchplate around the pickup adjuster screw on the '64 sunburst Strat**

60s Gibson SG Custom in walnut (left) and 60s Gibson SG Custom in white

Pickup selector on the walnut 60s SG Custom

Martyn Booth Honeyburst signature model

Distinctive headstock with sunflower inlay

John's 60s Gibson 335 Stereo

Above, **Yamaha SA 2000 with Seymour Duncan humbuckers (left), Rosendean Black Ruby (middle), and close-up of the Black Ruby headstock (right)**

"Eventually, this 60s Gibson SG Custom in walnut (opposite page, top left) was the closest I could find to the stolen model, which I tried to emulate by adding black pickup surrounds and a gold-plated Vibrola system. There's only one original humbucker here as well, I think the middle and bridge units are Seymour Duncan."

John's incredibly fast playing technique requires anchoring his little finger on the scratchplate for support.

"You'll notice on the walnut SG that I piggy-backed another scratchplate on top of the original, so I had a little extra height for the little finger of my strumming hand.

"I played an SG for years, they're great rock guitars, but I started to find mid-60s necks too narrow for my style. I moved forward years ago and started to play guitars which I felt valued my style of playing within sound and playability. I still love Fender guitars, but by nature I am a Gibson player. I think a lot of players out there are on the wrong guitar, if you know what I mean.

"It took me a while to sort out what was the best for me. My dad was a jazz pianist, so jazz was all over the house, which I loved, and I also liked Hank Marvin, the gypsy jazz that Django Reinhardt played, and blues from the likes of Buddy Guy.

"When I was about 17, I was in the inevitable school band in the mid-60s and starting to hang out in some of London's now legendary rock, blues and jazz venues. The Speakeasy Club was a late-night meeting place, and one of the guys in our band organised Jimi Hendrix to come and see us play. He said I was great, which I'll always remember. In late '65, I went to see Eric Clapton in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. It was that iconic period when he played a Les Paul through a Marshall, which blew everyone's mind.

"Guitarists were saying Eric was just another London guitarist, but he invented the whole thing"

"Guitarists were saying Eric was just another London guitarist, but he invented the whole thing and influenced so many up-and-coming household names in the guitar world. The big giveaway was they all ripped off his playing and everyone went out and bought a Les Paul and a Marshall. I know this because I was there, on the spot at the time. I got to know him and he liked my style.

"My favourite solid-bodied guitar for live and recording work for a long time has been this Martyn Booth Signature (opposite page, bottom left). Martyn is a great British luthier. He was so helpful when I asked for my own spec within the design. This included a maple-over-mahogany body, through-body stringing, coil-tapped Seymour Duncan jazz pickups and a Hipshot vibrato >

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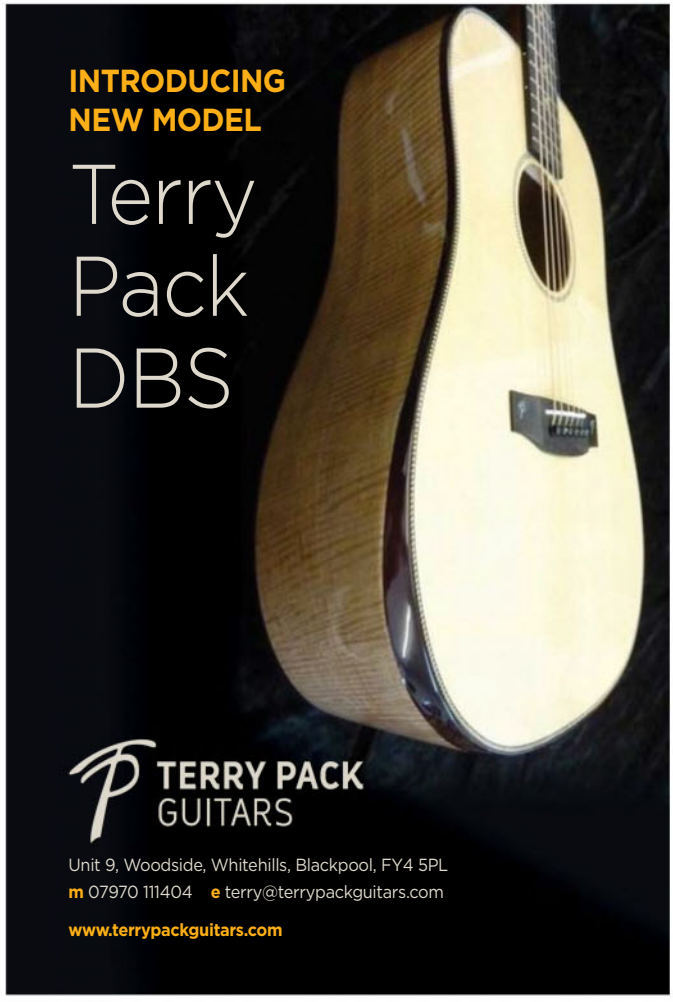

system. We worked on the neck dimensions for ages, and he produced one of the most comfortable I've played, extra fat and with a wide ebony fingerboard and jumbo frets. Each of his models has an individual headstock inlay, mine has a sunflower." The playability and precision of the neck and fingerboard are of the utmost importance for John's playing style.

"They have to be spot-on, especially if I'm shifting chord shapes really quickly whilst keeping the top and bottom lines going," he says. "I've played a lot of vintage Les Pauls from the 50s, and whilst they sound great, they're really tough to play. For me, speed is of the essence, so it has to be an ebony fingerboard, as on this 60s Gibson 355 Stereo, which I bought from New York's 48th street in 1978.

"I played this one for a while, but as I have huge hands, the narrow neck problem crept in again. I persevered for a while, then came across this Yamaha SA 2000 with a wider neck that felt great. So I set about installing a pair of Seymour Duncan humbuckers and carved up the body to fit a Kahler vibrato.

"I was so pleased with this guitar and its performance that I used it live alongside this Rosendean Black Ruby for the next 25 years.

"For me, speed is of the essence, so it really has to be an ebony fingerboard, as on this 60s Gibson 335 Stereo"

"The Black Ruby was custom built for me by Trevor Dean, another brilliant UK luthier, in '96. It's a large semi-acoustic archtop, the back and sides are built from black-eyed Iranian larch, giving exceptional lightness and strength with a half block running under the pickups.

"A couple of years ago, I made an album of library music, where I was asked to record a jazz guitar album, so I used several of my archtop jazz guitars. These included a pair of Gibson ES-150 models, one fitted with a P-90, dating from '52, another from 1937 fitted with a Charlie Christian pickup, and this wonderful Gibson Super 400, which belonged to Louis Stewart, one of the world's finest jazz guitarists. This is such a charismatic instrument, which has an enormous body but a skinny neck. I also used this Hofner A2L on that album.

"I did a lot of radical work on this guitar, which included fitting a floating Gibson pickup, which gives more attack at the front of the note but less sustain. I also had an ebony fingerboard fitted and it all worked a treat. I used this one on an album called *Whatever's Best*, which I recorded with Danny Thompson.

"I'm currently mixing my next album – out later in 2015 – which features myself and the amazing >

Above, left to right, **'52 Gibson ES-150 fitted with a P-90, Gibson Super 400, '37 Gibson ES-150 fitted with a Charlie Christian pickup, John's Hofner A2L fitted with a floating pickup**

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Headstock of John's Selmer Maccaferri

Close-up of Greg Smallman Australian acoustic

Selmer Maccaferri, built in 1934

Gibson L-7 archtop in natural

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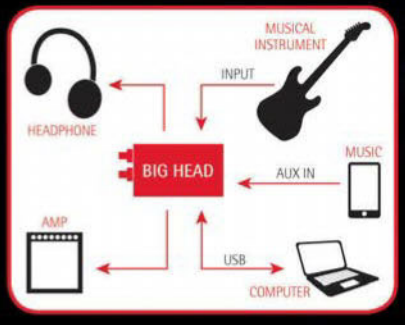

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Vimala Rowe on vocals. I'm using this '83 Tele, which has top-loaded strings through the bridge plate. If you look closely at the bridge, you'll see I've replaced the A and low E with bass guitar strings. I play a walking bassline with my thumb whilst picking chord shapes, it's really effective. There's a track called *Dark Shadow* on this album, where you'd think there was the tightest double bass playing along with me.

"I have several acoustics, a nice Martin 00-18 dating from 1938, which sounds lovely, but hard to play, and this Collings 0M1, which is their take on the Martin. It's superbly put together and plays like a dream."

Whilst John loves the authenticity of old archtop classics for live work, he is rather pleased with his modern-day semi.

"Trevor Wilkinson at Fret-King Guitars said he'd like to build me a signature model. I asked for a small-bodied semi-solid with a half block, a deeper wider neck, ebony fingerboard and through-body stringing. Here it is, a Fret-King Black Label FKV3JE Elise, which I'm very pleased with. It also has the company's Vari-Coil system, so I can wind down the humbuckers progressively to single coils and back.

"About seven years ago, I bought this original Selmer Maccaferri, built in 1934, which has an unusually short 24¼-inch scale, instead of 26½. I'm sure this is what makes this guitar so special for Gypsy jazz.

"It's a bit fragile for the road now, but it's been on numerous albums recorded with my band Sweet Chorus. I originally put this band together as a tribute to the French jazz violinist, the late Stéphane Grappelli, who I played and toured with for many years."

"I have several acoustics, a nice Martin 00-18 dating from 1938, and this Collings OM1"

Gypsy jazz players and fast fingerpickers will know, playing this style on steel strings really plays havoc with the fingernails.

"Oh for sure," says John. "I go regularly to the nearest nail bar and get them reinforced with an acrylic covering. I kinda get some odd looks from the ladies when I walk in, I'm thinking of getting a t-shirt with 'Guitar Player' written on it!"

For more information on John Etheridge, visit: www.johnetheridge.com

Above, **John replaced the A and low E strings with bass guitar strings on his '83 Tele (left and middle), Collings OM1 and a Martin 00-18 dating from 1938**

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *Guitar & Bass*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for inclusion in a future issue.

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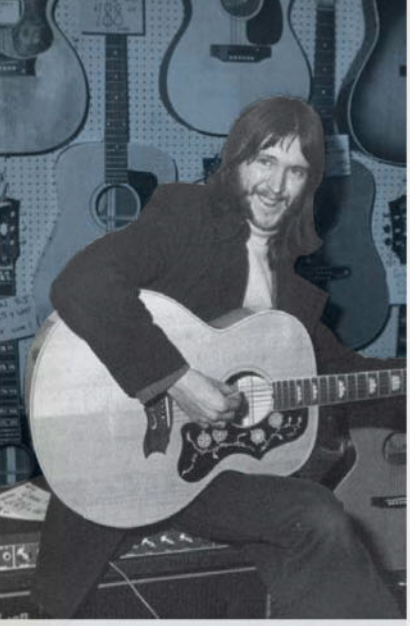


I'M NEVER GOING TO PLAY THERE AGAIN!

Performing live can be a rich, rewarding experience, but it can also lead to moments you'd rather wipe from your consciousness, as **SID BISHOP** explains...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

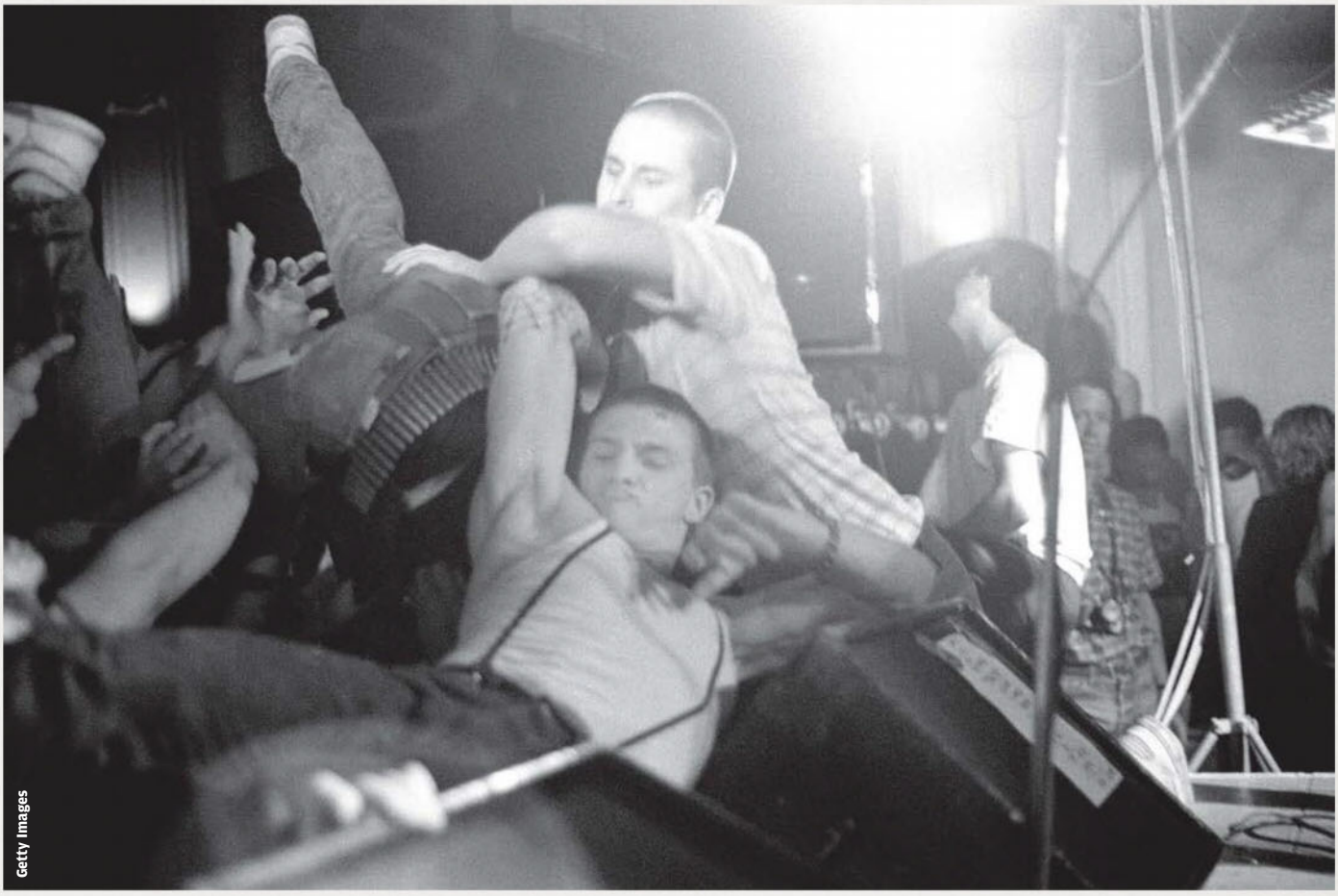
I am aware that some of you reading this will rarely play live, some of you never do, but I suspect that many of the readers of this magazine gig regularly, and the earnings derived from that activity will form part, or possibly all, of your income. Thus, by now you well know how an eagerly-anticipated gig can sometimes descend rapidly into a complete nightmare. Sooner or later, this happens to everybody. There are a variety of reasons for this, the majority of which will be totally beyond your control. I've had my fair share of such nightmares during my playing career, just a small selection of which are described here, and passing on to you some of these experiences might go some way to illustrating what can go wrong, why that will most likely not be your fault, and may hopefully console you when things go pear-shaped.

So you turn up at the gig, get all the gear set up, everything dropping into place like a well-oiled machine, then it becomes obvious that you've been booked into a completely inappropriate venue. Although you're a greasy biker band, you notice with horror that the hall is full of skinheads, and you know instantly it's not going to go well. Equally, you could be a Celtic folk group or a mod revival band confronted by 200 or 300 glowering bikers. Oops! With a bit of luck, you manage to complete your set, get paid, and escape without getting your head kicked in.

Sometimes you're not that fortunate, and I can vividly remember doing a gig in Enfield, being booed off the stage, and then being pursued by a mob of skinheads waving knives and butcher's cleavers, finally managing to find refuge in a school gymnasium. Once the thunder of bovver boots had subsided, we managed to make our exit, though things got a little worrying there for a while.

Whilst on the subject of inappropriate bookings, I was once in a very loud psych band who got booked to entertain a Rotary Club Literary Society dinner in Sheerness-On-Sea, and on another occasion in an equally loud rock group who were asked to perform at a gig in Bletchley for Yamaha Organ School students, not one of whom was under 70. What were they thinking? We fulfilled our contractual duties, and in both cases the audience stoically remained in their chairs, bless 'em, and with faultless good manners endured what must have been, for them, excruciating torture. I'm fairly confident that Cream and the Grateful Dead were not their usual fare. At the Bletchley gig, I wasn't particularly surprised to see the stage curtains close after just three numbers, closely followed by the power being cut off. Still got paid, though!

To this day, I can never visit Potters Bar without remembering a night when we got into a fracas with a biker gang. We were booked to play at the local club, and during a break in proceedings our road manager had invited a young lady to a nearby pub. Turned out that said young lady was the girlfriend of the leader of this particular gang, and trouble ensued. We were attacked on stage by a snarling tide of black leather, but having the advantage of the high ground, and weapons such as mic stands, we gave a good account of ourselves and the bikers retreated, though not before threatening even worse violence in the car park after the gig. They never appeared, so we drove home from Potters


Getty Images

Here's what could happen when a greasy biker band are inadvertently booked to play to a hall full of skinheads

Bar victorious. His libido undiminished, our road manager persisted in his habit of picking up young ladies at gigs, usually without thinking it through first, and this was far from the only example of strife caused directly by his behaviour. He was very good at his job, though, so we kept him and learned to cope with the consequences.

We were once driving back to London after a gig at the Dorking Halls. It was the early hours of the morning with little traffic on the roads, when a speeding car roared past our van and disappeared into the night. As it did so, there was a sound like a gunshot. We didn't think much of it at the time, putting it down to a backfire, but when we got back and unloaded the van there was a bullet hole in the side, with a slug lodged deeply into a Marshall PA cabinet. If any of us had been resting against the van's panel rather than the cabinets, then one of us would have been killed or badly hurt.

"There was a bullet hole in the side of the van, with a slug lodged deeply into a Marshall PA cabinet"

Yet another night etched forever into my brain was one when we performed at the old Country Club in Haverstock Hill, sadly closed back in the early 70s. First set complete, we were getting organised for the second when the drummer couldn't be found. A search was mounted and he was eventually located face-down in a puddle in the car park, comatose due to the over-consumption of some illegal substance. We thought that was to be an early end to the evening's entertainment, but somehow we got him sufficiently conscious and finished the gig. I'm confident, by the way, that the editor of this magazine would urge me to advise you all that taking any drugs in gig situations is generally a bad idea. It's not big and it's not clever.

Although bands can sometimes unjustly become the focus of an audience's frustration at life in general, it's not unusual to see fights break out that do not directly concern you. The wisest thing to do in these situations is to play on through the whole chaos, whilst at the same time defending yourselves and your equipment.

I was once involved in a nasty incident when supporting Led Zeppelin at Exeter Town Hall, where a gig for the university students had been thrown open to the public, and was invaded by a large number of squaddies from the local army base. Now, squaddies and hippie student types don't mix very well and it wasn't long before the venue descended into complete mayhem, including an attack on the band dressing room, resulting in the theft of a Danelectro belonging to Jimmy Page.

I was unwise enough to throw a beer mug at one of the soldiers who was behaving especially badly, and although I missed, hitting an innocent hippie by mistake, their collective drunken fury was instantly directed at me. It was only the presence of some Hells Angels who happened to be roadies >

for us on the night that saved us from serious damage. We then required a police escort to get us out of town in one piece. I am forever grateful to the Angels, and the Exeter city police.

Risks can arise in other ways. One function band I was in were booked to play a private party in Harpenden. The festivities were to be in the back garden of a large house, and for our convenience the host had laid a waterproof tarpaulin over part of the lawn, upon which we set up all our gear. We powered up from a single four-gang extension socket fed from the house, and which trailed across the garden. Then it rained. We'd just begun playing when I became vaguely aware of a sound resembling bacon frying, and a peculiar tingling sensation in my legs. Our bass player, by chance an electrician, told us to immediately lay down our instruments and get off the tarpaulin, all of which had become live. He later told us, in very colourful terms, that we'd had a very close call.

It sounds simple, but it's essential that you turn up not just at the right time, but on the right day. This has reminded me of driving all the way from London to Brockenhurst in Hampshire, only to discover that we'd arrived at a venue exactly a week early. Human nature being what it is, mistakes get made from time to time, and in this case either the promoter made an error, or our agent did, or just maybe we'd got it wrong. A major waste of time and petrol, though. I recall our dear friends the Edgar Broughton Band, who once turned up for a gig at Hornsea on the Yorkshire coast and, upon finding an empty venue, closely checked their contract only to find that they were booked to appear in Hornsey, North London, not far from where they lived. This was the cause of much amusement, except to poor old Edgar of course, and his band. The lesson here is double check everything without fail, especially how much you are due to be paid.

That brings us to the grubby subject of money. In general, gigs are for a fixed, pre-arranged fee. Sometimes the guy at the gig who has been made responsible for paying you is unaware of this fee, or claims to be, which can give rise to robust and animated disputes. By the end of the night, you've become very tired, probably hungry and ill-tempered, too, just wishing to get home as soon as possible. Sometimes, allegedly, there's not enough cash available to pay the band's musicians (or the drummer), and there will be occasions when you just have to cave in and grudgingly accept whatever money you're offered, and take the balance by cheque, which inevitably bounces.

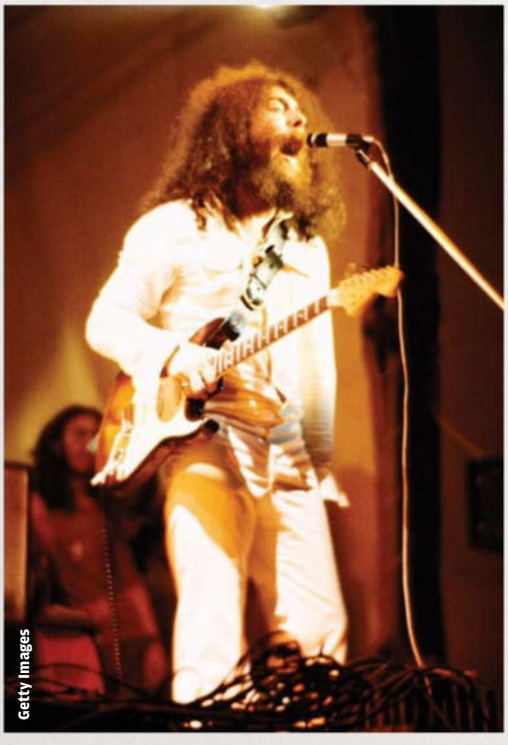
"We'd just begun playing when I became aware of a sound resembling bacon frying, and a tingling sensation in my legs"

In some places, an admission charge is levied at the door, and you will be guaranteed a share of this. It's a bit of a gamble, but a band could potentially do quite well out of such an arrangement if it's a popular pub on a good night of the week, but it doesn't always work out that way. I can recall going to the barman at the end of a particularly quiet night at a pub in Thornton Heath and being given three quid. "Sorry, but that's it guys," he said. "A bad night all round". What could we do?

On top of all of this, a whole host of other problems can arise, and it's worth bearing in mind that if something can conceivably go wrong, sooner or later it will. In a perfect world, you could do a gig, play at your absolute best, have no hassle or equipment failures, go down a storm, get paid fully, and in cash, then with much back-slapping be asked if you can please come back next week, a final bonus being taking home a nice girl you met at the bar.

Sadly, life is rarely that generous. Assuming that the van doesn't break down en route, and further assuming that one of you hasn't been electrocuted by an errant piece of equipment, which used to happen quite regularly in a less health and safety-conscious past, there will even be occasions when, for no obvious reason, you just can't seem to get the sound right, in spite all those many hours of rehearsals, and you drive home afterwards feeling thoroughly disconsolate, wondering whether all this effort and personal sacrifice is really worthwhile.

Or you aren't playing well and you know it. In your mind, you blame worn-out strings, or the guitar's set-up, but in reality it's just you having a bad night. We are all human. We get tired, bored, even road-weary from time to time, or maybe you just gave your all to an unreceptive, apathetic audience wearing cowboy hats who made no secret of the fact that they'd rather have spent the evening at home watching TV, and they didn't like your sort of music anyway; they were hoping for a C&W band. Been there? Me too! Would I ever be stupid enough to go through it all again? In a heartbeat!.



Edgar Broughton performing at Reading Festival, 12 August 1972

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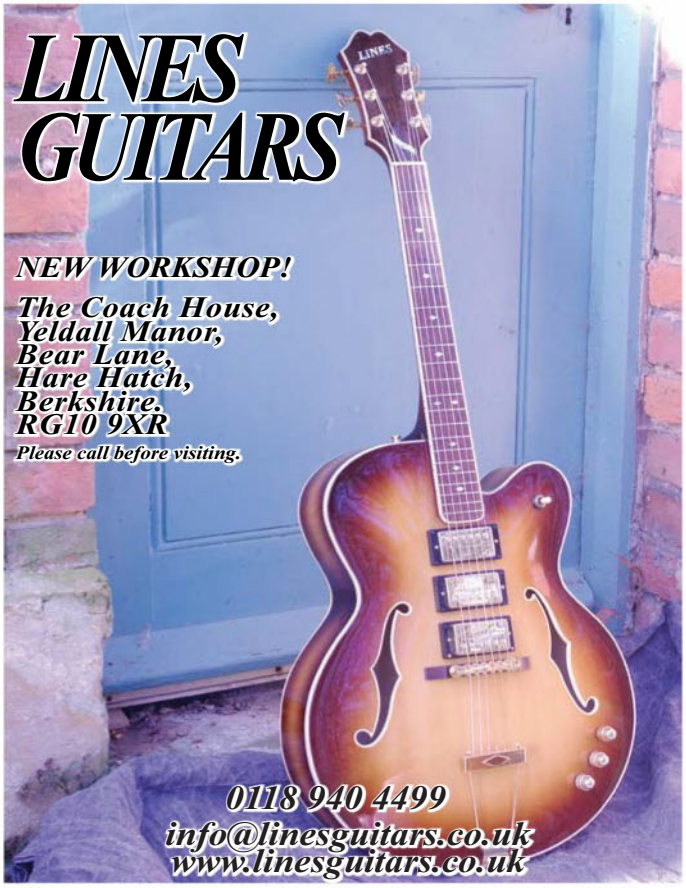

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All about... tremolo

Tremolo is the daddy of guitar effects and we've used it since the 1940s. But there has always been confusion about what it really is. **HUW PRICE** charts tremolo's ups and downs...

Those of us who experienced the unremitting tedium of formal music lessons may recall long lists of Italian terms that had to be memorised for theory exams. Among them might have been the words 'tremolo' or perhaps 'tremolando'.

The musical use of tremolo predates electronic effects by several hundred years – at least. Tremolo was almost certainly first produced by string players moving bows back and forth rapidly using very short strokes. Since sound is generated only when the bow is moving, it's clear that the volume level must drop as the bow changes direction.

This results in a series of volume peaks and troughs and, if the player's technique is good, then the effect will sound smooth and regular. Check out the intro of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 9* to hear this in an orchestral context. Tremolo is a key technique in mandolin playing, too. A plectrum is used instead of a bow, but the rapid back and forth movement is the same.

In both cases, a playing technique is employed to create the tremolo, but tremolo as an added effect was first heard on church organs during the 16th century. The effect was produced mechanically, with a diaphragm opening and closing to modulate air pressure – but pitch fluctuated along with volume.

Rhythmic pitch fluctuation is called vibrato, which is different to the volume fluctuations of tremolo. Nevertheless, both terms have long been used interchangeably and incorrectly – in the musical world as well as the patent office. So Leo Fender can be excused to some extent. By the 1930s, electronic musical instruments were being developed, and the first electronic tremolo effect appeared on the market in 1941.

Many aficionados regard the brownface-era 'harmonic vibrato' as Fender's best design

Electro-mechanical tremolo

Most electric instruments have volume controls so that you can create your own tremolo effects. Hit a chord and turn the volume knob back and forth and you'll get tremolo – but would you really want to do that all the way through an entire song? It makes a great deal more sense to automate the process, because it's far less exhausting, it sounds better and both hands are then freed up to deal with the real business of playing.

It's well known that DeArmond developed the first electronic tremolo, but they were initially installed in the electric Storytone piano during the 1940s. Before

The DeArmond 601 Tremolo Control (left). Devised in 1946 – the first standalone unit

The Demeter Tremulator (middle) emulates classic Fender optical tremolo, while the Electro-Harmonix Super Pulsar (below) offers adjustable sine, triangle and pulse waveforms

long, DeArmond's 'Tremolo Control' became available as a standalone unit that can legitimately claim to be the first guitar effect.

A motorised spindle shook a canister containing electrolytic fluid. As the fluid sloshed around, it conducted varying amounts of signal to ground, which made the guitar volume fluctuate. Many of these units were discarded after the electrolytic fluid dried up, but they can be rejuvenated with an injection of Windex cleaning fluid.

Bo Diddley and Muddy Waters used this tremolo, as did Duane Eddy on *Rebel Rouser*. Billy Gibbons is also a fan and tells some great DeArmond anecdotes, but it's wise to take most of what he says with a generous bucket of sodium chloride.

Amp tremolo

Mechanical tremolos, like tape echoes, require maintenance, and invariably wear out. This made the move to purely electronic tremolo inevitable. By the late 1940s, Danelectro, Multivox and Gibson were selling tremolo-equipped amps. Magnatone and Fender finally boarded the trem-train in 1955.

It's interesting to note how Fender's implementation of tremolo evolved over the years. In the 1955 Tremolux, a 12AX7 valve was used as an oscillator to generate a varying voltage that was applied to the cathode of the phase inverter valve. This varied the bias, which partially turned the phase inverter valve on and off and caused the volume to rise and fall.

For the later Vibrolux, the oscillator voltage acted on the bias of the power valves. Many aficionados regard the brownface-era 'harmonic vibrato' as Fender's best design. It achieved a pseudo-vibrato effect by splitting the signal into high and low frequencies and modulating one with low-frequency oscillators working in opposite polarity. The result falls somewhere between tremolo, vibrato and phasing.

During the blackface and silverface eras, Fender used a photocell resistor – essentially a resistor that reacted to light. Simply put, the oscillator drove the light source and the resistor acted like a light-driven volume control. This type of trem is characterised by an asymmetrical response, where the volume rise and fall occur at different rates.

Tremolo pedals

Amps with built-in tremolo tend to be bigger and more complicated. The tremolo circuits occasionally fail, and where there's a 'normal' channel and a 'vibrato' channel, the former is often considered to sound superior. If tremolo is an occasional treat for you, a tremolo pedal will be cheaper, less hassle and your core tone may be better if you're not obliged to play through a 'tremolo/vibrato' channel.

With amp tremolo, you are stuck with the basic characteristic of the circuit, but as we've discovered, tremolo is a more subtle and nuanced effect than simply a volume pulse. If you would prefer brownface tremolo with your tweed amp or optical trem with your Brit-inspired Class A combo, pedals allow you to mix and match.

Most amp tremolo controls are limited to speed and depth – or variations on the theme. Choosing the right tremolo is about feel as much as sound, so the waveform of the oscillator makes a huge difference. Some pedals enable you to set the waveform to taste for a variety of tremolo sounds and feel.

Remember how Johnny Marr matched his trem speed to the tempo of *How Soon Is Now*? It's hard to achieve using an amp, but some trem pedals have tap tempo and even subdivision switching. Maybe you prefer fast swell and slow decay, or vice versa? There are pedals that will allow you to do both, or even select a symmetrical shape.

Modern tremolo pedals come in many forms, with op amps, JFETs and even valves. Some of these pedals have photocells, just like blackface Fenders, and you can even choose between mono and stereo.

Unlike chorus and phasing, tremolo has a timeless quality, and the choice has never been better for occasional users and obsessives alike.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Having identified the three main categories of amplifier tremolo, we came up with a stompbox for each type – along with a modern-style tremolo with user control – that cover just about every parameter. Here are four of the top tremolos that we believe are worthy of your attention.

KINGSLEY BARD
$275

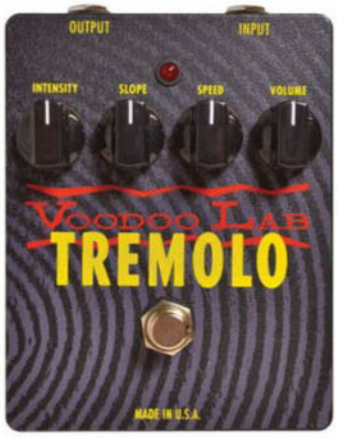
The Bard is basically amp tremolo in a stompbox. Running a single 12AX7 valve at a full 275 volts, the circuit generates a Princeton-style bias modulated tremolo effect. Controls are straightforward, with speed and depth. There's also a volume control to compensate for perceived level drop with tremolo engaged, or it can provide a clean boost.

CATALINBREAD PAREIDOLIA 2 £153

With three valves and complex circuitry, the tremolo circuit used in the brownface Fender Twin, Pro and Concert didn't last for long, but this harmonic tremolo remains the ultimate for some. This pedal is designed specifically to replicate Fender's 'harmonic tremolo', and the controls include speed, depth and volume.

VOODOO LABS TREMOLO £109

To recreate the blackface and silverface tremolo, Voodoo Lab used an identical lamp and photocell assembly. The slope control adjusts the feel from smooth and vintage to 'machine-gun stutter'. Along with speed and intensity, there's a volume control to cut or boost the output level.



SEYMOUR DUNCAN SHAPE SHIFTER £199

One for the pathologically indecisive because it promises to be 'every type of tremolo' in a box. Features include depth, rate shape, wave and phase. It also has stereo inputs and outputs, plus tap tempo for easy synchronisation.

Chord Clinic

Suspended chords can create an ethereal, hypnotic feel, and are a valuable addition to your chord vocabulary. In the second instalment of this series, **ROD FOGG** delves into the world of the 'sus' shapes...

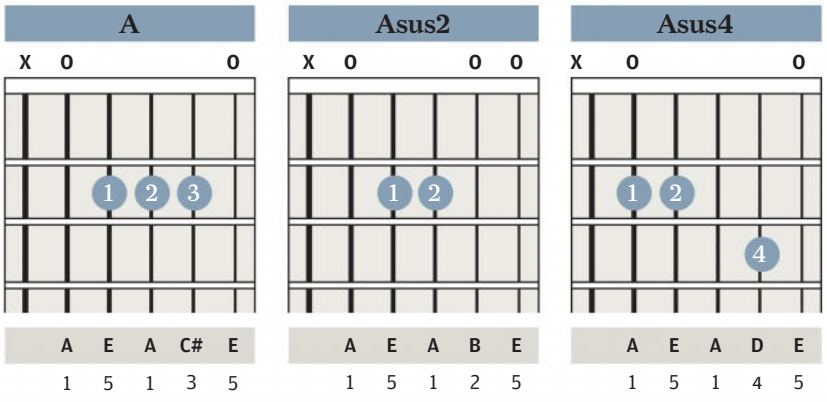
Sus2 and add9 chords

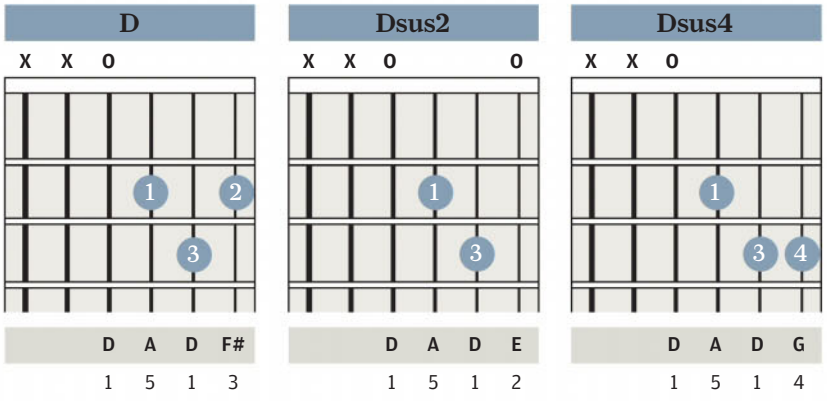
Last month, we got started with the basic major and minor chord shapes and then took a look at what happens when you raise the third of a major chord one fret – producing a sus4 chord. Sus is short for suspended, and the only other note you can suspend is the second. To make a sus2 chord, the third of a major chord is lowered a whole tone, which is the same as two frets. This produces a chord with the formula root, second and fifth.

Asus2 and Dsus2 are easy chords to play, as you release a finger and the sus2 note is found on the open string. Try alternating between the major chord we studied last month and the sus2 chord for a pleasing mixture of chord movement, together with the effect of not really going anywhere. Then try playing D, Dsus2, Dsus4, Dsus2 round and round and you'll get something like the intro to KT Tunstall's *Other Side Of The World*. The sequence works just as well with A chords, and if you end on the major chord instead of the sus2 you might come over all Christmassy as John Lennon sings "And so this is Christmas...". Sus chords don't seem to want to progress in the sense of moving on to a different chord – they're really happy just to let the suspended note return to its original pitch in the major chord.

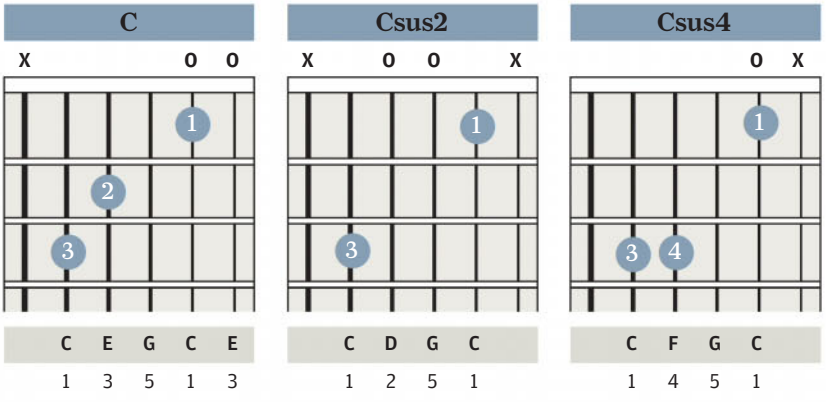
The other three major chord shapes can't be turned into sus2 chords quite so easily – but it's definitely worth trying. For the Csus2 shape, we have a couple of options, the first of which involves muting the open E string with the underside of the first finger and letting go of finger two. There is a sus4 voicing available, too, as we saw last time. These low suspended chord voicings have a lot of character – try playing KT's chord sequence using these C chords and see what you think.

Sus2 and sus4 chords (Fig 1 & 2)





Lowering the tone (Fig 3)

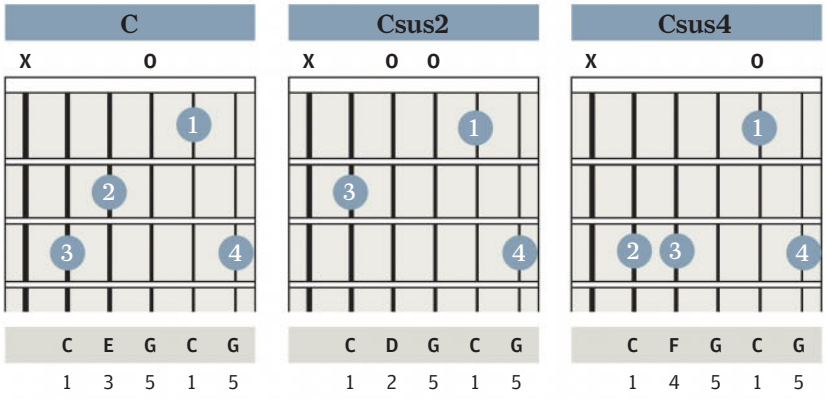


If muting the open E is tricky for you, try dropping the pinky on the third fret of the top string and alternate between Csus2 and C major. Adding this high G note means we have a doubled fifth in the C chord – it has a chiming, ringing quality preferable in many ways to the doubled third in the standard C chord, or the shapes in figure 3, which don't use the top string at all. A quick re-fingering also lets you play a Csus4 voicing that goes well with the other two shapes.

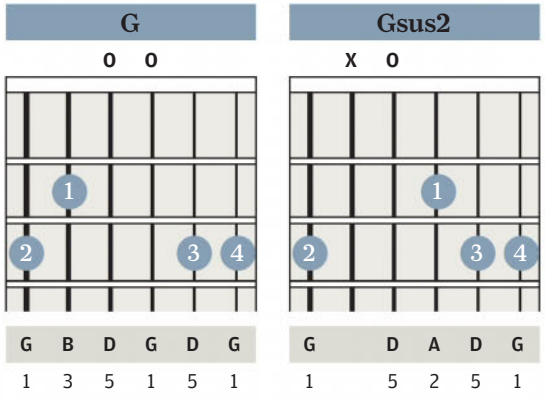
Figure 5 does for a G major chord what figure 4 did for a C major, taking away the doubled third and adding a nice chiming doubled fifth instead. Gsus2 also sounds great with this voicing – if you are alternating between the sus2 and the major, there's probably no need to keep putting your first finger back on the A string. Just mute the A string all the time with the underside of your second finger.

Subtle variations in chord voicings, like those in figures 3, 4 and 5, can add a great deal to your music. Even if you are just playing a cover version of a well-known song, adding a chord with some extra colour, an unusual voicing or a suspension can really take your version to the next level. Be prepared to experiment, and always trust your ear for what sounds right.

Alternative C voicings (Fig 4)



Adding a double fifth (Fig 5)



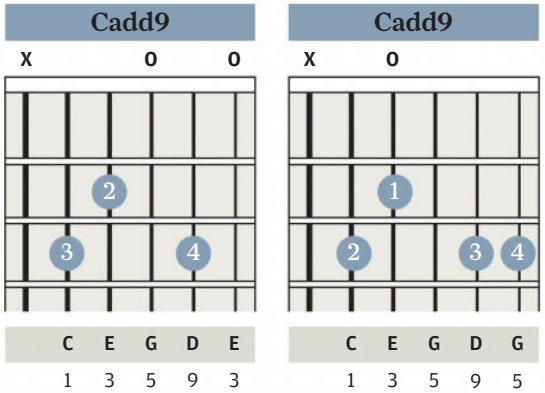
Add9 and add11 chords

In all the shapes we've looked at so far, we've gone to a lot of trouble to avoid having the third in the chord along with the sus2 or sus4. So what happens if you simply add the second or fourth note to the chord, leaving the root, third and fifth in place? Answer: you get an add9 and an add11.

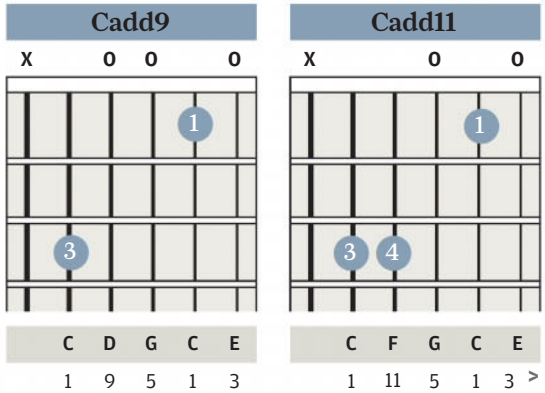
The convention is that these added notes are viewed as coming from above the fifth, which takes them up into the next octave, where a second becomes a ninth and the fourth becomes an eleventh (think of it like this: if C is one, D is two. Now keep going: EFGABCD, etc, and you'll find D is the ninth note above C and F is the eleventh). Heading back to C major, we have a couple of voicings for Cadd9. Take your pick between the one with the doubled third or the doubled fifth. Which one you choose could depend on the next, or maybe the previous chord. For example, if you have just played G major, as in figure 5, it might be musically effective to choose the second shape, which will keep the top two notes the same. It might be tempting to follow that with the Dsus4 chord from figure 2 so that three chords in a row have the same two top notes. Stick a capo on the second fret and you're almost heading into Oasis' *Wonderwall* territory, but I was able to track down songs by artists as diverse as Alicia Keys and Tom Petty that use these kinds of chord sequences.

Figure 7 introduces another Cadd9 chord, this time with the added ninth low down on the D string. This pairs very nicely with an added 11th chord with a similarly low position for the added note. Played on its own, this Cadd11 produces quite a clash with the open E string. However, played in sequence with the major chord and the add9, the forward movement seems to conceal the clash. It's worth remembering that forward motion in a chord progression can make many kinds of temporary dissonance tolerable.

Voicings for Cadd9 (Fig 6)



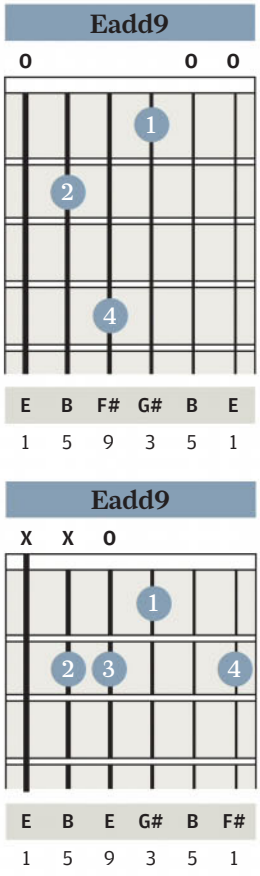
Add9 and add11 (Fig 7)



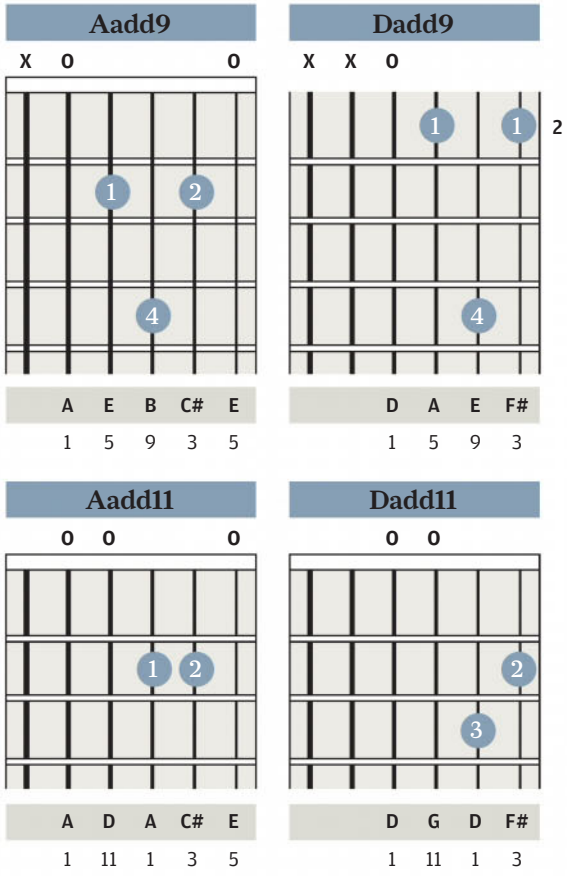
Somehow, we've managed to get this far without having any E chords. In fact, Eadd9 in the lower voicing can be a bit of a stretch. Try mixing it with the open E chord and Esus4. The higher voicing (the second chord diagram in figure 8) has a sweet quality, which makes me think of Barry Manilow not being able to smile without you, although Jimi Hendrix turned this into a movable shape and played the sliding chord intro to *Castles Made Of Sand*. But I'm saving movable shapes for a future instalment.

We're going to finish off with Aadd9 and Dadd9, both of which need to be compared with the sus2 chords from figures 1 and 2. Keeping the third in the chord sounds so much sweeter than the comparatively stark sus2 voicing. Different is not necessarily better – we're looking at chords in this way so that you can choose voicings which suit the music you are playing or writing. Just to end with a bang, the last two chords in figure 9 are the wonderfully ambiguous Aadd11 and Dadd11, where the low position of the 11th makes you wonder if these are A and D chords at all. Oh, and we left the fifth out of the Dadd11 chord because the fifth is always the first note to leave out when things get tight. Chords are wonderful things...

E options (Fig 8)



Keeping the third (Fig 9)



CLASS 5 ROULETTE.

The successful Marshall Class 5 has returned in the guise of the special edition Class 5 Roulette range and is only available in the UK.

Made in the UK and available in combo or head & cab formats, the Class 5 Roulette Range is offered in two different cosmetic stylings: red and black, or silver, white and black and is limited to just 300 units. (100 each of the combos and 50 each of the stacks.)

Contact your nearest stockist for details.

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Marshall

Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: wine-box boards, Temple boards, more bass please and Dave Black remembered...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

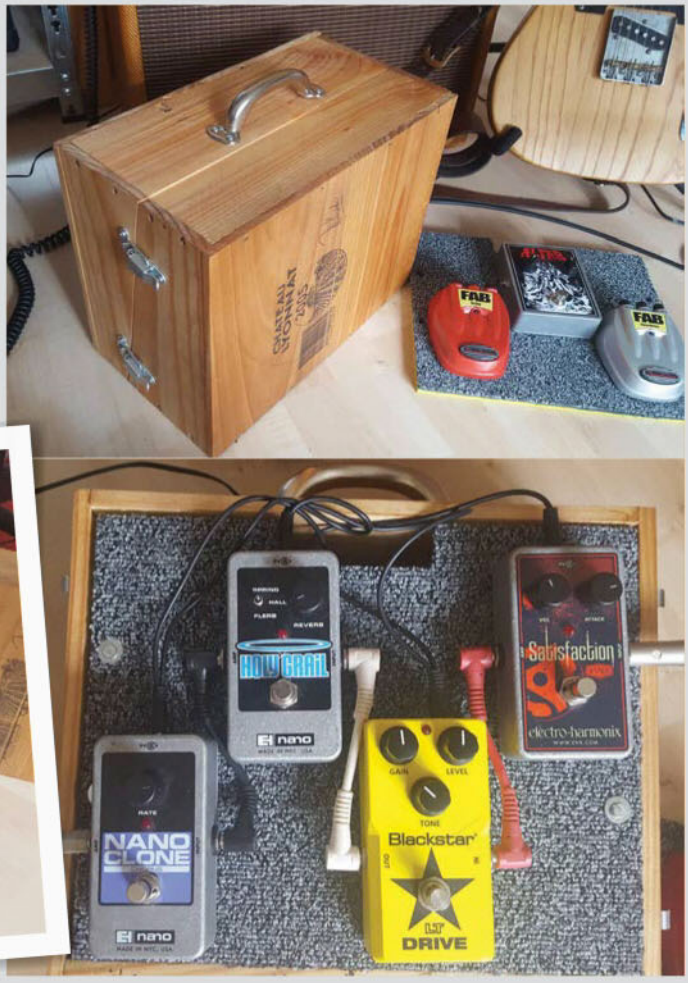
Wine-box build

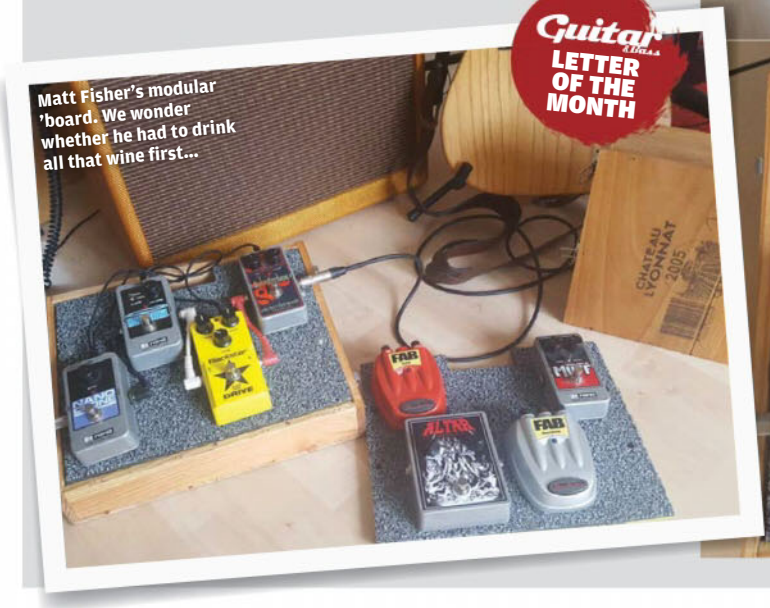
Hello guys, I've just finished my pedalboard, following Huw's DIY Workshop in the September issue. I liked the modular concept and 'hidden power supply', but wanted something portable. Whilst thinking about options over some liquid refreshment, the idea of a wine-box case surfaced – portable and you can use the lid as a drinks tray during the gig. Nice.

Love the new look, always love the 'hands-on' practical stuff... keep up the good work, etc.

Matt Fisher, via email

***G&B** Your pedalboard looks great, Matt! Has anyone else followed Huw's advice and built their own modular 'board? If so, please send your pictures to the usual address*





WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

Tin machines

I loved the Micro Machines feature in last month's mag... and it solved the problem I had with my tone: I didn't have an Altoids tin on my board! Massive improvement, thanks again.

Ray Faulder, Cramlington

***G&B** Thanks Ray. We've heard that vintage Altoid tins sound better. The red ones have more gain....*

Temple Boards

Thank you for the review of the Temple Audio Design Solo 18 in the September issue. There should be no need to use Loctite or similar in the module mounting holes. The size of screw and tapped thread was carefully calculated for its job. In early production batches, however, from which the review board came, we discovered that the material used for powder coating the end-plates could enter the tapped screw holes. Upon tightening, this extra material could, on occasion, cause the thread to strip. This has now been corrected (the taps are plugged during coating) and of course we will replace any end-plates that have been affected.

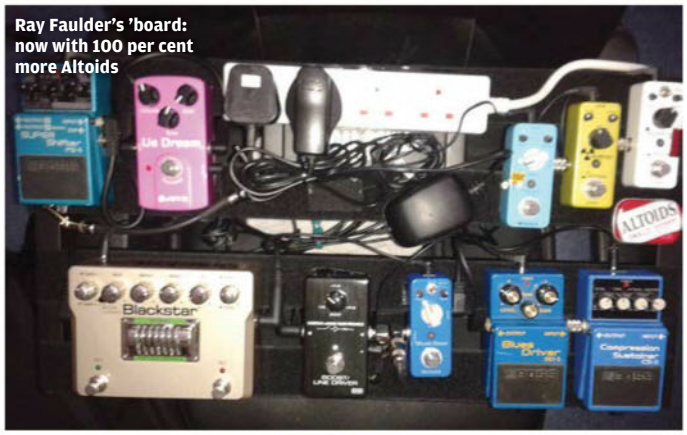
In the few months that the UK office has been operating, we already have a growing number of professionals using the boards on the road, including Ella Henderson's guitarist Ross Chapman, who has two boards and used a Solo 18 on the Jimmy Fallon show in New York. Dan Pugsley, bassist with Skindred, has a board and Luke, Michael and Callum from punk-popsters 5 Seconds Of Summer all have boards on their world tour. From their legendary guitar tech Nigel Banks: "Thanks for making a product that's obviously been designed by musicians. You have made my life so much easier."

All the boards mentioned have modules installed. All the best.

Vince Rice, www.templeboards.co.uk

Bass desires

Hi chaps, first off I have to say I love the mag, been buying it for years and it's easily the best guitar publication on the market. You produce great features on all aspects of what is, let's face it, the coolest instrument on the planet! I particularly enjoy the features on vintage guitars/basses and equipment, always fascinating stuff. Personally, I own both guitars AND basses, but I am principally a bassist, therefore there's one thing that does bug me, and I think it's getting worse... the lack of print



Ray Faulder's 'board: now with 100 per cent more Altoids

dedicated to the noblest of all the string-based instruments – the bass guitar! I know the word 'bass' is in smaller print than 'guitar' in the magazine title, but come on! There has to be more stuff out there to enthral us low-frequency addicts that your talented writers can document! Some months, there are only nine or 10 pages of content donated to us guys 'n gals that hold down the beat and everything else revolves around! We're not even asking for half a magazine's worth, a third will do the job! It would be appreciated, I'm sure, by all 2, 4, 5, 6, 8... oh, even 10-string thumpers out there...

That said and rant over, keep up the good work you wonderful people!
Mark Williams, Bristol

G&B *Thanks Mark, ironically your letter coincides with an issue in which we've published a feature on the most successful bassist in pop history, and focused on his guitar playing! Hopefully, Gareth Morgan's Sandberg review and the 6 Of The Best in this month's issue will satisfy your craving. Look out for a new bass tuition column in the new year, too.*

Dave Black remembered

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Dave Black died tragically on 18 July, near Cullercoats Metro Station [North Tyneside]. Dave was best known for co-writing the 1978 hit for his band Goldie, *Making Up Again*, which spent 11 weeks in the UK singles chart, peaking at number seven. It was written by Dave and Pete McDonald, and released on the Bronze label. Duran Duran guitarist Andy Taylor described Dave as a "mentor", who gave the aspiring guitar hero lessons as a teenager. "He taught me some serious chops and song structure, which was invaluable stuff to a 13- to 14-year-old," he said.

Dave was born in Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear on 2 February, 1953. In the early 70s, while still in his teens, he formed five-piece prog-rock band Kestrel, and wrote all but one of the songs for their self-titled album, released in 1974 on the Decca Cube label. Although the album didn't chart at the time, 25 years later vinyl copies began to change hands for high prices, leading to its reissue by a Japanese CD label in 2000.

In 1975, Dave and Pete MacDonald joined The Spiders From Mars after the departure of David Bowie & Mick Ronson. They released one self-titled album. After the demise of the Spiders, Dave formed Goldie in 1976, which included vocalist MacDonald and Tom Knowles from Kestrel. Goldie continued to perform and record together for four years, disbanding in 1980. They released three singles and appeared on numerous TV shows, including *Top Of The Pops*. For nearly a decade, beginning in 1980, "Blackie" concentrated on a new group, 747, who were stalwarts of the North East club scene. Although they had no chart success, they appeared on an 80s TV talent show called *The Fame Game*, performing a number of Dave's compositions. He then began a solo career, as well as a sideman stint in the Brendan Healy Band.

Dave was a well-respected musician and a very popular character. He will be sadly missed by his family and the music community.
Mike Hall, via email

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us by snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE FIRST REVIEW
Marshall Astoria Classic

Will the Brit amp legend's new valve combo kill off boutique competition?

1967 FENDER CUSTOM TELECASTER

Our next Vintage Bench Test puts a beautiful old Tele through its paces

INTERVIEWS

Dan Auerbach • Billy Bragg
Chrissie Hynde • Jimmy LaFave

REVIEWS

James Collins, Tyyster
Boss, Moog, Epiphone
Radial, Norman

VOL 27 NO 3 ON SALE 06 NOV

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Keith Richards
CROSSEYED HEART

Crosseyed Heart gets under way with Delta licks straight from the Robert Johnson school, but they're something of a red herring for what's to follow. This second solo album from Keef in 23 years isn't some wistful meander through his influences (although from Chuck Berry to Gregory Isaacs, they can pretty much all be heard here). Instead, it's a dirty, ramshackle, romantic, often witty and above all hedonistic collection of songs, that sometimes approaches his prime Stones work (*Trouble* and *Robbed Blind*), and at other points entertains with knowing self-parody (*Amnesia*). Richards' drunken JJ Cale/Tom Waits vocals carry some telling lyrics and choruses, and as well as his own trashy riffs and rhythms, some excellent electric additions from Waddy Wachtel make this an energetic and thoroughly enjoyable stomp. **CM**

8/10

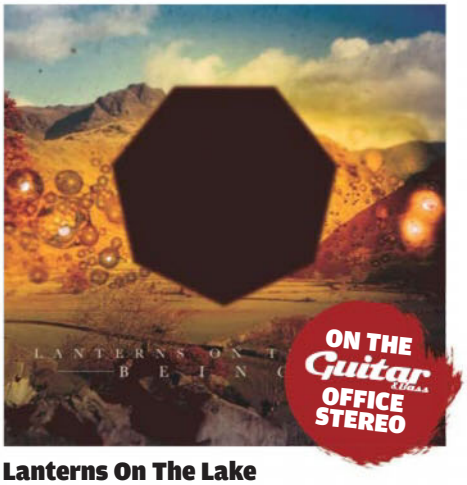
TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Rolling Stones, Tom Waits*

Joe Bonamassa
LIVE AT RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Coming hot on the heels of the slick electro-funk of Rock Candy Funk Party's second long-player, the latest release from almost certainly the hardest working guitarist in showbusiness finds Bonamassa occupying territory that long-standing fans will find more familiar. The CD and DVD are compiled from two sold-out performances at the iconic New York City venue back in January of this year. Separate acoustic and electric bands provide expert accompaniment, while Bonamassa's electric playing sounds more expressive and discerning than ever; his newly-adopted vintage tweed Twin and Bassman backline requires a little more fight and lends a more open and dynamic voice to his ever-present Les Pauls. To our tastes, it makes for a much more exhilarating listen than the syrupy sounds of old. Don't expect Bonamassa to slow down any time soon... **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Rory Gallagher, BB King*



Lanterns On The Lake
BEINGS

The Newcastle band's third album is another heart-rendingly beautiful release, comprising dynamic post-rock atmospherics and tender revelations. The ominous piano chords of opener *Of Dust & Matter* set the foreboding mood, while *I'll Stall Them* has a tremendous shimmering tremolo-picked lead line. The production, handled expertly by guitarist Paul Greogry, is rich and tasteful throughout, with Ebows, reverb-soaked ambient guitar textures and brass parts dissolving into one explosive melancholy whole. Such grandeur is balanced by delicate piano vignettes, such as *Send Me Home*, that find vocalist Hazel Wilde baring her soul. Gregory executes some wonderfully affecting playing with a cello bow on the title track, alongside a pleading vocal that disappears into swirling tape echo. A refined, absorbing listen from start to finish. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Explosions In The Sky, Sigur Rós*

New Order
MUSIC COMPLETE

Calling your first album in nine years *Music Complete* is a bold statement of intent, and New Order deliver with this stridant 65-minute record. Featuring guest production by The Chemical Brothers, it sets off like a dancefloor express train, then becomes more diverse in scope. Look out for the europop of *Tutti Frutti* and the menacing *Stray Dog*, with an inspired crazed preacher appearance from Iggy Pop. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *New Order, Pet Shop Boys*

The Dead Weather
DODGE AND BURN

With Jack White on sabbatical from live music, this side-project album is good news for fans. His drumming channels John Bonham on *I Feel Love*, and he shares vocals on *Three Dollar Hat* – closer to his solo work. However, the record has most in common with vocalist Alison Mosshart's main band, The Kills. She sounds strangely at home on final track *Impossible Winner*, a Bond theme-style left-turn. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Kills, Jack White*

Cheatahs
MYTHOLOGIES

Cheatahs are a multi-national collective, drawn from the UK, Germany and North America, and this second album was recorded on the road. Its hazy, time-stretched fuzztones and woozy vocals owe a debt to My Bloody Valentine, with *Signs To Lorelei* and *Seven Sisters* particularly dreamy. The sprawling *Reverie Bravo* is more forthright, and closes the album in epic shoegaze fashion. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *My Bloody Valentine, Sonic Youth*

FEATURED ALBUM

David Gilmour

RATTLE THAT LOCK

It's beyond question that David Gilmour is one of the greatest players ever to wield a Stratocaster, and on this follow-up to 2006's *On An Island*, there's no doubting his uncanny ability to wrench every ounce of emotion out of the fingerboard. Every lead break is a masterclass in economy and telling phrasing, conveyed using a choice palette of amp tones and guitar sounds – and there are liberal helpings of Les Paul and Gretsch in here, too, balancing out the sheer Floyd-ness of his iconic and imperious Black Strat.

Such superlative guitar playing aside, Gilmour's in fine vocal fettle, too, but apart from the up-tempo title track and the Stevie Wonder-meets-Peter Gabriel pop-funk detour of *Today*, this is a largely contemplative set of compositions. The gravitational pull of sadness at the heart of the atmospheric *A Boat Lies Waiting* isn't matched by the leaden *Faces Of Stone*, *Dancing Right In Front Of Me* and the jazz-infected *Girl In The Yellow Dress*. *In Any Tongue*, on the other hand, is likely to be a standout track for many Floyd fans – it's a near-seven-minute, brooding anti-war statement aiming for the epic, with a combative, shimmering, classic outro solo to suit. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Pink Floyd, Leonard Cohen*

Hotei

STRANGERS

Iggy Pop is among the stellar guests on Tomoyasu Hotei's first global release. Guitar crunch abounds on 4/4 epics such as *Medusa*, which boasts surf guitar and cinematic soundscapes, while skewed lead and slick fingerwork pervade. Lyrically, it's uninspiring, but there's an unbridled feel, such as when Pop launches into tracks such as *How The Cookie Crumbles* and *Walking Through The Night*. **NC**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *David Bowie, Bill Nelson*

Anna Von Hausswolff

THE MIRACULOUS

This Swedish songwriter and her band produce dark, dense proggy fairy tales that erupt into huge feedback-heavy psych-guitar workouts. It's all underpinned by the towering sound of a 9,000-pipe Acusticum organ, opening with the doomy 10-minute epic *Come Wander With Me/Deliverance*. Von Hausswolff's voice somehow soars above the dense fog of instrumentation and is truly spellbinding. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jefferson Airplane, Anna Calvi*

Reissue spotlight

David Bowie

FIVE YEARS (BOXSET)

This veritable treasure trove of Bowie's classic early-70s albums comes packaged in a sumptuous boxset, featuring the original albums on CD or vinyl. What you get is the first six studio releases (excluding the oft-maligned eponymous debut and including two versions of *Ziggy Stardust*), a couple of live albums and a rarities compilation.

Much has been said about these records and their influence over the past few decades. However, one aspect that all too often goes undiscussed is the importance of guitarist and arranger Mick Ronson, who stands as perhaps one of the most underrated guitar players (and teen idols) in the history of British popular music. Ronno, as he was affectionately known back in the Spiders' heyday, was almost as popular a figure as Bowie/Ziggy himself amongst the record-buying audience of the early 70s.

His arrangements from *The Man Who Sold The World* onwards are superb, and contribute massively to the sound of a still somewhat undeveloped songwriter. *Hunky Dory* stands as testament to this, with the piano and strings parts dominating the mixes of the standout tracks, turning compositions such as *Changes* and *Life on Mars?* into timeless classics.

By the time of *Ziggy Stardust* and *Aladdin Sane*, Bowie's posse had developed into a concrete and somewhat heavy live rock 'n' roll band, with the powerful and dexterous Les Paul of Ronson the primary musical element. Although Bowie's career would see him work with many creative guitar players, it was his partnership with Ronson that produced the most celebrated work.

Arguably, this first box doesn't really represent Bowie himself at his creative high; that accolade surely belongs to the flawless album cycle of *Station To Station*, *The Berlin Trilogy* and *Scary Monsters*, from the latter half of the 70s. But captured here is the irresistible musical journey of a young creative singer/songwriter who would become a glam-rock behemoth (with more than a little help from some extremely talented friends).

It's a journalistic cliche to describe Bowie as a chameleon. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. He stood out *because* he was so different, applying a more cerebral element to pop music. Listening to these albums in succession, what's striking is how coherently they flow from one to another. If you're just starting to delve into the Bowie back catalogue, then this is the perfect starting point (if you've got a spare £185 that is!). **AP**

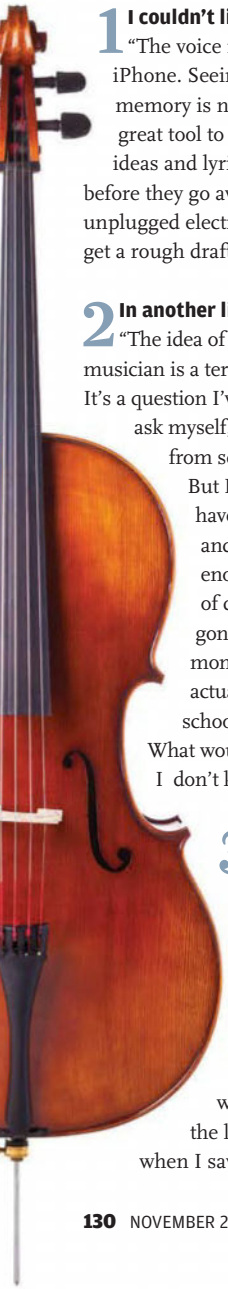
9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *David Bowie*

NEIL FALLON

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Clutch frontman Neil Fallon is no stranger to hard riffing, but there's a lot more to him than that...

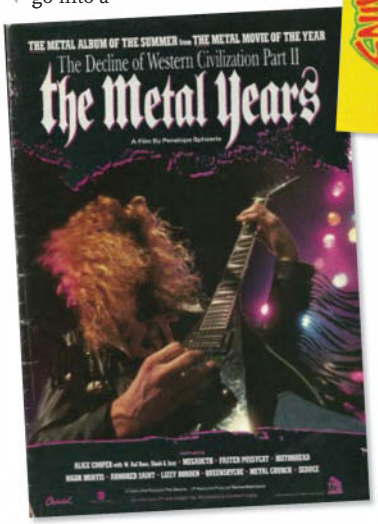


1 I couldn't live without my...
"The voice memo on my iPhone. Seeing as my long-term memory is non-existent, it's a great tool to get down guitar ideas and lyrics very quickly before they go away. Even if it's an unplugged electric guitar, just to get a rough draft down."

2 In another life, I would be...
"The idea of not being a musician is a terrifying prospect. It's a question I've never had to ask myself, as I went straight from school to doing this. But I probably would have stayed in college and racked up an enormous amount of debt. I might have gone into teaching; my mom's a teacher and I actually liked the school environment. What would I teach? I don't know..."

3 The band that started it all...
"I bought a lot of metal records when I was in junior high, but the first show that I saw that really split my wig was Bad Brains in the late eighties. That's when I saw that live music could also be a kind of existential experience, when it's that good."

4 The one that got away...
"Before the internet ruined good deals on the road, I did go into a pawnshop in Oklahoma City and bought a 1972 SG for $300. And I had it for years, it was an excellent guitar, but I needed some rent money and sold it like a dummy. I wish I could get that back... it's a very typical story!"



5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"There's so many to choose from! I have said the wrong city on a number of occasions. Particularly when we're in Ohio and you have Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland. They all begin with the letter C and I always get 'em confused. That's about as literal Spinal Tap as it gets, I guess..."

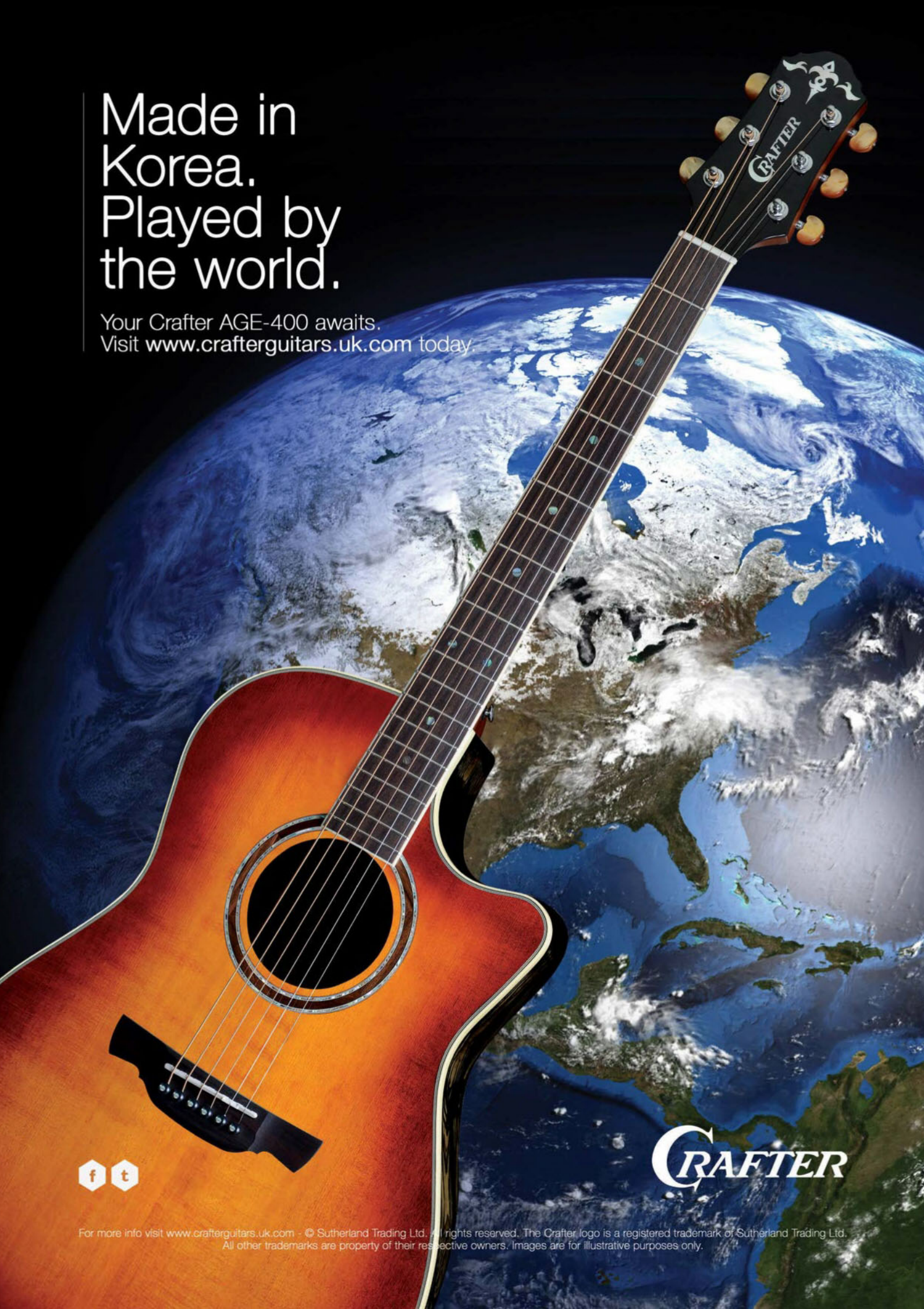
6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"One of the greatest pieces of wisdom is actually in *Decline Of The Western Civilization Part II* when Ozzy Osbourne says, 'don't fuck people on your way up, because you'll meet them on your way back down as well'. It's good to exercise some humility in this business."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I'm a big fan of Travis picking – I can't do a heavy metal guitar solo to save my life, but I can fingerpick. And that's a fun thing to do, especially when experimenting with open tunings. That's my go-to thing on guitar. We have a number of songs that derive from that..."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Water. It's the kind of thing you don't think about until it's gone. It's the most important thing."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I don't feel guilty about listening to anything, that's my caveat, but I'm a big Brian Eno fan. It's a good ear-cleaner after listening to heavy music all day long to listen to ambient synthesisers from the 1970s."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"When I was in grade school I played cello and I quit. I wish I hadn't. Carrying my cello from school to home was a pain in the ass. If I could pick that up again it would be great. I really love the sound of it."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